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CHAPTER I

A MESSAGE IN CIPHER

THERE was one voice that Captain Fox Elton had learned never to ignore. That was the small, thin voice of intuition, the soft whispering from the subconscious mind that passes by the name of hunch. It was a lesson he had learned as a Government operative back in the United States before the War Department borrowed him for counter-espionage and shipped him overseas under a captain's bars.

Therefore, when the face of a middle aged engineer lieutenant detached itself rather conspicuously from among the throngs of typewriter shock troops who were out for a noon airing in the American headquarters village, Elton turned his mind to a search for the reason.

Although he had not been conscious of the fact before, he remembered now that he had seen that face several times before.

A Novelette of the

Military Intelligence

THE PRUSSIAN SPYMASTER

By ARED WHITE

The lieutenant was not an officer to attract attention ordinarily. He was too old for his rank, his shoulders were slightly stooped and he marched in a shamble without military setup. The Army was filled with such men, specialists of various kinds who had been borrowed from civil life and tucked away for special duty at various headquarters behind the lines.

But there was something in the face of the engineer officer that had claimed Elton's attention, fleeting as his glimpse had been of the man. He held it up now before his mind's eye and examined the details that had been left with almost photographic accuracy upon his mind. A long, angular face under an immense head. The mouth was a taut, bloodless line, though with a thick pendant lower lip. The cheekbones were high, nose a powerful beak, eyes deepset under squinting brows. Elton was struck by its power, the evidences of an incisive mind, quick imagination and a certain suggestion of harshness, even cruelty. Not a man to be shambling about with a stoop in his shoulders and the humility of a lieutenant's bars at forty, he told himself.

The face served to conjure up another face. Or, rather, the fact that the lieutenant was emerging, when he saw him today, from a shop dealing in instruments of precision on the Rue de Chamerandes. Elton had gone there a few days before to have his pocket compass repaired. The man who accepted his compass had puzzled him. A small, servile man with a bulging, almost disproportionate forehead and large, sea blue eyes that were cold and expressionless. Although the fellow had stood with a hand rubbing meekness and spoken in a high pitched deference, the rôle did not fit him. Elton had paid little attention to the inconsistency at the time. The incident merely had lodged somewhere in a remote recess of his brain, to recur now by association.

The inconsistency of those two faces took definite form in his mind. It occurred to him that at his convenience he would check up upon the engineer officer. It might be, he told himself, that his own nerves were jumping at shadows, reading suspicion into the most commonplace circumstances. Too many invasions of the spy haunts of Paris, too much stress at his desk wrestling with German cipher, too little rest from his official duties as a counter-espionage operative who was counted on for every difficult case at headquarters.

Since it was a mere passing suspicion, a random observation of two men who struck him as being strangely out of har-

mony with the rôles in which they were cast, Elton dismissed the incident, had a leisurely luncheon at the Hôtel de France and returned to his desk at the great stone caserne, peacetime home of the 109th French Infantry Regiment, but now occupied by American headquarters.

A particularly intricate task of cipher breaking which had held him desk bound for the better part of a week was practically completed. He needed only to verify his work and it would be ready for Colonel Rand, chief of the counter-espionage section. A new cipher the Germans had sent across, and the manner of its sending hinted at reliance upon the German secret service behind the French lines, since it was transmitted by French carrier pigeon. By a quirk of circumstance, the bird had been shot by a doughboy armed with a sawed off trench shotgun in a rest area outside of Paris. He thought he was getting a morsel for the mess, only to find a tiny metal capsule attached to the bird's leg, and inside that the following incoherent litter:

IAKCJCIAKAJC KDIDGAKDKAIC KAKDGFIAKCIC GDHCKAKDKA

Logically the missive found its way quickly to headquarters, and under Elton's expert hand had yielded slowly, since it was an adroit cipher the Germans had put out this time and, except for the repetition of high frequency letters in such a short message, probably would have balked Elton's efforts. But the Germans had chosen an unfortunate message for the purpose of secrecy of their new cipher. Elton quickly found that there was a repetition of letters in groupings of two, such as KA, which appeared five times; IA, which appeared three times; and IC, which appeared twice in the group of symbols.

During the forenoon, his endless rearrangement of alphabet and cipher symbols had developed the apparent key. A repetition of the map-coordinate system in which two letters of the cipher indicate one letter of the text. His key read:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
G	A	F	K	P	U	Z
H	B	G	L	Q	V	
I	C	H	M	R	W	
J	D	I	N	S	X	
K	E	J	O	T	Y	

As in the case of figures used to locate letters in similar cipher tables, each two letters pointed out a single letter of the English alphabet, the first letter indicating line, from left to right, the second placing the column of letters from top to bottom in the key. Thus, of the first two letters of the message—IA—the letter I fixed the line of letters intended: the third line. The second letter of the two, or A, fixed the column: the first column. Which meant that IA deciphered into the letter C; the letters KC became O; the letters JC meant N; and following the process on through the cipher message, the following English equivalent was produced:

CONCENTRATE METZ COMPLETE

His job finished, Elton's face fell. A week's work to break what appeared to be an ordinary combat report. Numerous tests for verification of his work convinced him that he had got to the bottom of the new cipher. As to whether it meant exactly what it said, that was a matter for Colonel Rand to determine.

"Well, I'm sorry, Elton, that you've been put to all this trouble for nothing," said the colonel when Elton appeared before the counter-espionage chieftain with his report. "You're sure, are you, that you've got it right? It looked to me like a much longer message than just three words.

"I'm positive, sir," said Elton.

"All I can make of it, then," reflected Rand, "is that the Germans were reporting some sort of a concentration, perhaps of reserves, and their pigeon went astray."

"I was told, sir," said Elton, "that the pigeon was identified as a French pigeon, and that it was not exhausted when brought down on the wing, flying strong."

"In any event," the Colonel concluded, "I can't see where this message is buying

us anything, now that we know what it means. I'll send it along to operations, though I can't see that it will benefit them."

"It certainly doesn't spell anything to me," Elton replied, "although I do have the feeling that there's something more than a lost pigeon behind it all, if we only knew what it was."

COLONEL RAND indulged in his favorite thought provoking gesture of rubbing his long, thin nose with the index finger of his right hand. The colonel was a man of ponderous mental processes, thorough in matters of detail, well balanced, a competent soldier who would have been leading a regiment of American cavalry except that the cavalry had been ruled out of American overseas plans for the time being. But he was totally devoid of imagination, pinned no faith in intuition, believed the subconscious mind was a book word that had no significance, and his one value in his present assignment was that of a sane executive who organizes and directs the energies of others without interfering too much in their methods of work.

He replied to Elton's suggestion by changing the subject altogether, and abandoned his somewhat pompous dignity to smile up at his youthful star assistant.

"I believe I've got a detail for you, Elton, that will benefit the service. I'm thinking of sending you south to Nice," he said pleasantly. "How would that strike you, young man?"

"Excellent, sir. What is it at Nice needs going into?"

"The Mediterranean!" Rand paused to smile expansively at his own rare attempt at humor. "There's rings under your eyes, Elton. You haven't had a leave since you came to France, and now's a good time. Since we broke the Boche on the Marne and pushed him back of the Vesle, there's not a great deal going on."

"Thank you, sir," said Elton, "but the Colonel will recall that every time I plan a leave, something turns up at the last minute. Besides—"

"Make your getaway this afternoon, Captain. My advice is get some rest while you can. This lull is only temporary. There's some big war medicine being brewed at Marshal Foch's château right now. Those plans for St. Mihiel are pretty well worked out—and the Boche seems to know about as much of it as we do. But there's something really big coming up—and you'll be sure to lose a lot of good sleep before winter comes."

"There's rumors about, sir, that we'll be invading Germany before this time next year," suggested Elton.

"Rumors, eh? The American Army is the greatest rumor factory in the world, young man. You can hear anything, and the leaks are amazing. Let a general dictate something to a confidential field clerk and the whole Army has it over the grapevine by mess. But the thing that's in the planning now is too big to risk to dictation. There's not a dozen of us know it, and I'm not even giving you a hint of what's up. The surprise element must be preserved at any cost. But I can tell you this: get some rest now while the getting is good."

"If I'm to have a leave, sir, I'd much rather put in the time down in Paris. The Mediterranean sounds interesting, but I've got something I want to do in Paris."

"Yes, and come home a limp rag. Why, even a chaplain isn't worth a hang for a month after a week in Paris. It's no place for a rest, and you know it. In fact, I suspect a man's respectability the minute he begins hankering for a trip to Paris."

"With good reasons, sir. But there are two things I had in mind. First, I want to gratify an ambition of mine to see the original of Raphael's 'La Belle Jardinière'. I understand, too, that Murillo, Rembrandt, Van Dyck and Rubens have all been returned from the storm cellars in Bordeaux and are back at the Louvre. To me, that will be both a treat and a change of mental scenery."

"Opera, eh? Well, I prefer a good movie

myself. I presume the other diversion you hinted at is wine and women, to go with the song."

"The other was to nose about a bit on my favorite theory, sir, that the Germans have a first class spy safely entrenched in the French secret police."

Rand stiffened in his chair.

"A dangerous business, Elton," he exclaimed. "You know how sensitive the French are. What reason have you for believing they've got a traitor in camp?"

"Mostly what you'd call a hunch, Colonel. But that hunch gathered a lot of weight when Von Strindheim got out of Vincennes right under the eyes of the French."

"I thought you told me Von Strindheim poisoned the surgeon with hyoscine and made his getaway in the doctor's uniform. Didn't Von Strindheim boast to you of all that when he thought he had you safely trapped under Paris?"

"True enough, sir. But we must remember that the wily baron knew he was going to let me escape when he told me that. In turning me loose to trap his mortal enemy, Kastellaun, he naturally gave me his own version of his escape from Vincennes."

"Doesn't his story check up with the French version though?"

"Yes, sir. But who conceived the bright idea of using Von Strindheim as instructor in disguise for the French secret police while he was awaiting execution? Von Strindheim is a consummate master of disguise and, assuming the desire to get information from him was logical enough, the fact remains that some one must have slipped him a vial of poison and a small hypo needle. The baron's statement that he had these concealed in his hair when he was trapped is preposterous. No, the Boche have a friend at court, and he's the most dangerous man in France to us."

"Got any hint of his identity, any leads, or anything tangible to work on?"

"Nothing, sir. I'll simply have to go it blind in the hope of finding something that looks like a trail."

Colonel Rand thought again and rubbed his nose dubiously.

"Well, have your own way, Elton," he yielded. "But remember there's such a thing as being too free with your suspicions. Judgment is even more important than suspicion; and take good care to let our friend, Colonel Ourq, chief of their espionage section, in on the secret if you find anything."

"I'll be very discreet, sir," said Elton reassuringly. "If I find anything, I'll see Ourq at the proper time, though he probably wouldn't be willing to believe anything like that had been going on right under his nose."

CHAPTER II

HERR BREISACH LANDS IN FRANCE

ON HIS way out of the caserne, Elton saw a large French staff car roll into the parade grounds in such haste that the American sentry at the gate had to jump to avoid being run down. He recognized the lone occupant of the tonneau as Colonel Ourq. The French officer was leaning forward in his seat, the habitual attitude of staff officers whose urgency travels faster than their cars. Furthermore, his eyes were staring straight to the front and he was clearly under high tension.

With a muttered gratitude that the Frenchman had not seen him, Elton leaped into his own car and raced to his billet, where he dashed a few necessities into a musette bag and sped to the depot for the afternoon Paris express. But he reached the depot to find his worst fears confirmed. A staff lieutenant was waiting for him.

"Sir, Colonel Rand instructs me to say he's sorry," said the lieutenant, "but you are to report back to him immediately."

"It never fails," muttered Elton disgustedly.

He returned to headquarters in low spirits. There was little doubt in his mind but that Ourq wanted help again in invading the Prussian spy nest under Paris.

But until he had settled to his own satisfaction his dire suspicion that the German secret service had contact with the French secret police, Elton had no taste for another adventure in which the odds would be stacked high against his success.

The two colonels looked up from a grim silence with evident relief at Elton's entry. Even the amenities of French official greeting were cut short by Ourq.

"*Vive Dieu,* but I am glad we intercepted you, monsieur," said the Frenchman. "A single day, it is of very great importance at present."

"There is something new in the air, Elton," Rand spoke up, his voice betraying an ill concealed tension. "Sorry as I am to interrupt your leave again, you will agree that it is necessary when you have heard the details."

Elton made no effort to conceal his disappointment. He waited in silence for the others to disclose what it was that agitated them. Rand handed him a sheet of flimsy upon which a message from headquarters of the British intelligence service in London had been decoded. He read:

> We are able to verify report that Herr Kehl Breisach is being landed on coast of France from Keil by submarine.

When he had read the dispatch over carefully several times, Elton turned to the two officers with puzzled eyes.

"But this doesn't tell me anything much," he said. "I've never heard of the man and know nothing of his work."

"*Le bon Dieu!*" exclaimed Ourq scrambling to his feet. "But Herr Breisach is the secret eyes of the emperor himself. The head of the most secret of the secret police, the most treacherous rascal in all Europe, *mon Capitaine!*"

"That's saying a great deal for him," replied Elton, with a glint of amusement at the Frenchman's excitement. "Any information on what brings him to France?"

"There's only one thing that could bring Breisach to France in person," Rand spoke up. "That's to make a complete survey of Allied military plans for the future. The mere fact that he's coming shows how desperate the Prussian high command has become since we stopped them on the Marne last month."

"Sir, what is it the Colonel wants me to do about the case?" Elton inquired bluntly.

"We're going to assign you to help trap him, Elton," replied the Colonel. "We want our best operatives on the case, and Colonel Ourq says the whole French secret service will concentrate on Breisach. We've got to catch that sly rat at all costs."

"Got any idea where he's to land on the French coast, and when?"

"That's the first rub, Elton," replied Rand. "He landed some time ago. It's only a fortunate circumstance that permits us to know as much as we do. But not long ago British divers tapped a sunken submarine in the Straits of Dover and got the latest German code book. For the first time the British were able to find out the meaning of several short messages they'd intercepted when Kiel was talking by radio to its submarines at sea. It was one of those messages that betrayed Breisach's mission. As near as the British can figure it out, he must have landed in France about three weeks ago."

"I see," reflected Elton. "Then we have him on our hands at the present moment. Any trace of him?"

"Unfortunately, not a sign. Colonel Ourq has had the trail covered thoroughly from the Bay of Biscay north and from Le Havre and Brest into Paris. But it is reasonable to suppose that Breisach is in Paris by now, perfecting plans and organization for gathering the information he came after."

"More or less of a hunt for a needle in a haymow, sir."

"But Colonel Ourq has a theory, Captain. It sounds logical to assume that Breisach will use Von Strindheim's nest under Paris as headquarters, and will come and go from there."

Elton shifted from one foot to the other and the line of his mouth tightened. He knew it was suicide to attempt a third

invasion of the Prussian rendezvous in Paris. He would be identified instantly.

"Just what information have you on Breisach that will be useful in getting track of the shadow?"

"I'll let Colonel Ourq answer that question, as he is familiar with the rascal's past record."

COLONEL OURQ, with many shrugs, exclamations and gestures, quickly supplied the sum total of existing information on the subject of the Kaiser's spymaster. Photographs, none. Personal descriptions, vague and conflicting. Means of identification, none.

But there was a mass of general information. Breisach was said to be a Polish-Austrian peasant by birth. With an inherent genius for intrigue, he had managed to work his way into the confidence of the Kaiser. First as court spy who ferreted out internal plottings. Later, despite powerful objections from close advisers of the Kaiser, a purveyor in international secrets. Breisach was credited with the survey of Belgium and France that preceded the war, also with the same service in England and Russia. He did his work on a great scale, with the aid of a vast army of spies, always keeping himself under cover and receiving all reports through trusted lieutenants. He was said to have covered Belgium as a peddler, France as a collector of butterflies, Russia and England as a rich traveler.

But while this information was held accurate enough, all efforts to get an accurate description of Breisach failed. Various code and cipher messages, unearthed much too late, had verified his presence in the countries named. But as to his personal description, each country had a different version. There were no less than a dozen descriptions of him, ranging from a veritable giant to a puny dwarf of a man. In these descriptions, his age ranged from thirty to seventy, his weight from a hundred pounds to three hundred, his eyes from a piercing black to a mild, sky blue, his hair from straw colored to total baldness. Which led to the final conclusion that Breisach worked from cover, deftly putting a subordinate forward in the main rôle while he, perhaps, worked as flunkey, or without apparent connection with his henchmen.

"Not a very tangible person to get track of when all we know is that he's in France," said Elton, shaking his head dubiously. "It sounds to me like a good plan to keep all military secrets in vaults under time locks, or not reduce them to writing at all."

"Ah, but no secret is safe with Herr Breisach in the country!" cried Ourq. "Locks, they mean nothing to him. Who but Breisach could have taken from the safe in our own headquarters the French Blue Plans for the defense of our frontiers? Most luckily, we discovered the loss in time and our great staff was able to work out a new plan before the Boche struck."

"You had not mentioned that, Colonel Ourq," said Elton. "When did that happen, and what were the details?"

"In the month of April, some three months before Germany launched the war upon us, my Captain. We were warned, but in some mysterious way the plans were taken. Dummy papers were substituted so that the theft was not discovered in the daily check and it might have been most serious except that the chief of staff called for the Blue Plans during May, and we stumbled on to what had happened."

"How many of your officers, at that time, had the combination to your vault, monsieur?"

"But one, my Captain. The Commandant d'Ivry, a man of unquestioned loyalty, who swore that no one could possibly have gained the combination."

"The Commandant d'Ivry is still in your service, Colonel Ourq?"

"A hero of France, my Captain. He asked for relief from staff duty at the outbreak of war and went to the Front with his battalion. He was killed in action gallantly leading his troops against the enemy in front of Verdun."

"You had no direct suspicions of internal intrigue at the time? No arrests, no investigations?"

"Many investigations, my Captain. Until the war was upon us, we thought of little else. It was not until months later that we learned that it was Breisach who made the spy reconnoissance of France. Only a rogue of his imagination and cunning could have conceived such a plan as stealing the French defense plans from under our very eyes."

"And you had no theory of how he accomplished it?"

Colonel Ourq shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands far apart.

"No doubt with the aid of an expert in safe combinations. Who knows? There are many criminals with soft fingers! But what mystifies us most is how they located our document safe which is hidden behind a network of secret panels. And since no one knew but our own trusted officers, we suspect that our office must have been observed through powerful lenses from a distant roof. As for arrests, concerning which you ask, there was but one. We arrested him at the Crillon where he was stopping and questioned him on his purpose in visiting headquarters twice in May. He was able to prove that his visits were harmless enough. In fact, one of our trusted officers, whom he had called to see, vouched for him."

The expression of placid interest in which Elton had been listening to Ourq was replaced by a sudden alertness.

"One of your own officers, eh?" he exclaimed. "Tell me about that please."

Ourq's keen mind caught the implication and his eyes snapped resentment.

"An officer of unquestionable loyalty, monsieur," he said stiffly. "We gave due thought to the possibilities of intrigue. But there could be no question of Lieutenant Le Berceaux. A man of many generations in France, himself born in Paris. A man of great wealth, monsieur. Wealth that affords him every luxury, so that there could be no possible motive, as you must perceive at once."

Elton thought for some moments. Ourq had deftly stripped away the only two possible motives that might influence to treason such a man as the colonel described.

"His wealth, monsieur?" Elton asked presently. "He was born with great wealth, may I inquire?"

"But no, my Captain. From an aunt he inherited many millions of francs, more than any man could possibly require, and it was only because of his great love of the service that he remained with the secret police after his inheritance."

"The year of his inheritance, you recall that, my Colonel?"

"Yes, a simple matter." Ourq reflected for some moments. "Ah, the year of 1912—in the spring of the year. I remember it so well because he repaid to me at the time a small loan I had made him."

"Well, that eliminates Le Berceaux from the picture, doesn't it?" said Elton. "Of course, you must not think I had any direct suspicion of him, my Colonel. It is simply an American habit of procedure to suspect every one, and then eliminate as the facts develop. I'm glad you set me right on that matter."

Elton turned to Colonel Rand with a smile. His eyes were sparkling now.

"I'm really glad you headed me off, sir," he said with enthusiasm. "This case looks interesting enough to be better than a dozen vacations. I'm ready to make a start at once."

He turned back to Colonel Ourq.

"And Lieutenant Le Berceaux, my Colonel, he is one of your experienced operatives?"

"Yes, monsieur. There is no one who has a wider acquaintance with the great spies of Europe."

"Would it be possible, then, my Colonel, to have me assigned to work with him on the case of Breisach? Or, rather, pardon the reference, since I am senior in rank, have him assigned to work with me. In any event, have us work together on the case?"

"*Bien!*" exclaimed Ourq. "I will issue the instructions as soon as you are in Paris."

"He can find me, my Colonel, registered at the Crillon by noon of tomorrow."

CHAPTER III

AN SOS FROM HEADQUARTERS

WHEN Lieutenant Le Berceaux, of the French secret service, presented himself at Elton's apartment at the Crillon shortly before noon of the next day, he sharply upset every expectation Elton had formed of the type of man who was to appear. Le Berceaux's face was that of a man under thirty, but his hair was the driven white of a man of sixty and his poise and mental processes had the deliberation of advanced middle age. His face and manner suggested a man who lived without emotion, a man controlled wholly by the calculations of his mind, except that there was a hint of tragedy in his small, greenish eyes which looked out laconically from under drooping lids.

Le Berceaux spoke always in a low, reserved tone. There was nothing about him of swagger, of the *savoir faire* of the secret police, no pose of mental or physical superiority. A commonplace professional man whose capabilities and passions it was impossible to estimate since he kept his inner self so completely under domination.

"I am directed by my superior," he said when the formalities had been disposed of, "to work with you in a matter of great importance to France."

"I count myself fortunate, monsieur, to be permitted to work with you on this great case," said Elton. "Colonel Ourq advises me that you are the best informed officer in France on the subject of Herr Kehl Breisach. I, on the other hand, know little of him."

"Nor does any one, for that matter, so far as his personal appearance is concerned, my Captain," said Le Berceaux. "But of his methods I have made a study, and I pronounce him the most unscrupulous scoundrel of the German secret service. He is utterly without soul in his work and does not hesitate at anything, especially at murder, in which art he is a specialist. His black methods have cost France more than a hundred of our most gallant operatives, and I have no doubt that there are more to follow since the monster is now on French soil."

"Have his murders any special characteristics, anything that would enable us to identify his handiwork, monsieur?"

"Hardly. I doubt if he commits any of them himself. You must remember, my Captain, that Herr Breisach is an executive and I presume he carries assassins with him, or operatives capable of murder. Poison, knife thrusts, bullets, whatever suits the occasion. Very unlike the run of purely criminal murders, which ordinarily may be identified by their technique."

"His victims are those who get in his way, I take it?"

"Without doubt, my Captain. That is confirmed by the fact that our losses are confined to two classes—those who engage in counter-espionage in France and those who attempt espionage operations in Germany. The man's power of intuition is that of genuis, nothing less."

"Then, monsieur, since we are on the trail of Herr Breisach himself, neither of us can be reckoned what is termed a good insurance risk, eh?"

"No, my Captain, if we find a warm trail and get in his way. He would have no more compunction in knifing us than—than, say, our own soldiers would have in pouring lead into a hostile patrol that crossed their trail. But it is the game of war."

Elton took his silver cigaret case from his pocket and extended it to his guest.

"*Merci, bien,* my Captain," said Le Berceaux as he took one of the cigarets abstractedly and placed it in his mouth listlessly, without lighting it. "The American cigaret, it is most excellent."

"Have you any plan of getting Breisach's trail?" Elton asked bluntly. "And will you please tell me all that has been done so far?"

"We must search blindly for a lead, I fear, my Captain," Le Berceaux replied thoughtfully. He removed the cigaret from his mouth and absently ground it to fragments between his thumb and finger.

"But since he will operate with a score of spies, our greatest hope lies in arresting one of them and bartering with the fellow for his life."

"How many operatives are actively engaged in the search at present, monsieur?"

"The whole of the secret service, now available in France, my Captain, is warned to keep on the alert. But the immediate work is left to you and me." Le Berceaux shifted slightly in his chair and crossed his legs. "I forgot to mention," he added after several moments, "that the Senhor Major Aljezur, of the secret service of Portugal, has been summoned to France to assist. A most valuable operative, whose keen mind and strange powers of deductions and intuition should be of great value to France."

"Portugal, eh? You are certain, monsieur, that the Portuguese secret service is entirely to be trusted in so important a matter?"

"Do you forget, my Captain, that Portugal is one of our Allies, that twenty-five thousand of her fighting men are in our front lines?"

"*Pardon, monsieur.* I had lost sight of that fact for the moment. Perhaps because the force is so small as armies are reckoned today, and we hear nothing of Portuguese offensives. Is the Major Aljezur, by any chance, to work with you and me on the case?"

Le Berceaux' brows lifted slightly and he uncrossed his legs.

"But no, my Captain," he replied. "Senhor Aljezur reported his presence in Paris, since when we have not seen him. He has his own methods, and Colonel Ourq is satisfied to have him work in his own way."

"Well, what do you propose that we do first, monsieur?" Elton changed the subject. "Colonel Ourq suggested that Herr Breisach might be expected to hide himself in the Prussian rendezvous under the Rue Chambron. Do you share that theory?"

"I have not the least doubt of it, my Captain. At this moment, I suspect Herr Breisach is the guest of the Baron Erich Wolf von Strindheim. You know, of your own experience, my Captain, how difficult it would be to trap them there."

"You are suggesting that I have been there, monsieur?" Elton searched Le Berceaux' immobile face. "What leads you to think that?"

"Colonel Ourq told me quite recently of your remarkable success in trapping first Von Strindheim, then Von Kastellaun. It is a pity that Von Strindheim escaped later from us at Vincennes."

"But might it not be possible to repeat what I have done?" Elton inquired, closely observing the effect of this question upon the Frenchman. "Isn't it possible that I could effect some disguise, since I know the workings of the place now? It has occurred to me that any risk is worth taking that offers the slightest chance of trapping Breisach."

Le Berceaux observed the floor for a time and again shifted his legs. Then he shook his head slowly.

"I would strongly advise against such an attempt, my Captain," he said gravely. "You would be almost certain of detection, and Breisach would make short work of you. Though Von Strindheim amuses himself with his prisoners and outwits them into performing useful service for him while they lay traps for him, Breisach kills even on the slightest suspicion. So I'd estimate, my Captain, that your life would not be worth five centimes if you appeared there again."

The Frenchman's words sharply puzzled Elton. He had been confident the other would try by every means to maneuver him into the Prussian spy stronghold. Least of all had he expected a warning from Le Berceaux. He kept up a casual conversation, the while his mind searched for the meaning of such a warning. Le Berceaux had seemed to speak in all sincerity. He could have no possible means of knowing that Elton suspected him, had proposed the adventure merely as a test. Therefore, had Le Berceaux eliminated himself from further suspicion? Or was his warning the subtle craftiness of an ex-

ceptionally wary rascal who was gifted, himself, with rare intuitions, who sensed the suspicion that lurked in Elton's mind.

A rap at the door interrupted their further exchange. Elton opened the door to find an officer from American M. P. headquarters bearing a sealed message. He tore it open to read a bristling message from Colonel Rand. It directed him to drop everything instantly and return to headquarters by the fastest available automobile.

He suppressed the outer evidence of his surprise at the order and pretended to study the message while he thought rapidly of what explanation he should give Le Berceaux of the turn of events. The Frenchman evidently sensed his stress.

"A clew, my Captain?" he inquired casually. "Something pertaining to the case of Herr Breisach, perhaps?"

"Unfortunately, not," said Elton. "I had hoped headquarters would forget me while we worked out this case. But, as you know, our Army is young, and too much importance is placed upon combat reports intercepted in cipher. Unluckily for me, cipher is my specialty, as monsieur may know, and now I must return to my desk and perhaps lose altogether the great opportunity of running Breisach to earth."

"I am very sorry, my Captain," responded Le Berceaux. "You leave soon for your headquarters?"

"At my leisure, probably some time during the afternoon or evening," said Elton. "Since my responsibilities in Paris seem to have been ended, I may wait for the theater and drive back in time for reveille. The best I appear able to do now is wish you every success, monsieur, in your search for the elusive Herr Breisach."

"Thank you, my Captain," said Le Berceaux simply.

As the Frenchman bowed his way out, Elton thought he detected a distinct relief in the Frenchman's stolid expression, but of this he was not certain so completely did Le Berceaux mask his feelings.

CHAPTER IV

MISSING BATTLE PLANS

COLONEL RAND was pacing fretfully back and forth across his large office when Elton reported in a few minutes short of four hours later. The colonel's face was drawn, his tension such that he started at sight of a figure in the room. But at recognizing his star operative, his face lighted up and he sat down at his desk, motioning Elton to a seat close beside him.

"You made rather good time up from Paris," said Rand with an attempt at deliberation, which told Elton that the counter-espionage chieftain was badly upset.

"Three hours and fifty minutes from the Crillon," said Elton. "Your telegram rather suggested, sir, that I wasn't to lose very much time in getting here. One blessing of war is that there are no speed cops."

"The fact is, Elton, you shouldn't have left headquarters at all. Not that I'm blaming you for going. We started you out in the wrong direction to look for Herr Breisach."

"You mean you've got track of him, sir?" Elton demanded eagerly.

"Not a trace. But for the present this seems to be the place upon which he is concentrating his efforts. There's the merry deuce to pay over a little visit he paid us last night."

"Is that the reason, sir, I was stopped coming into town and forced to show my orders and identify myself? It cost me four minutes running time."

"No one is permitted to enter or leave this village without proper credentials. Not only the roads but the fields are guarded, and we've got a ring of bayonets out that can't be broken through, although it may be a case of locking the barn after the horse is stolen."

"What happened, sir?"

"Unbelievable as it may sound, Elton, the operations safe was opened last night and the most important papers at headquarters extracted from their sealed envelop."

Elton made no effort to conceal his amazement at the colonel's statement.

"That sounds almost impossible," he said. "In addition to the heavy combination lock, I understood an armed noncom is kept on duty over that room at all times. Was force used or the guard killed?"

"It was done under the nose of an unusually intelligent soldier, Elton, and so simply as to arouse no suspicion in his mind. An officer wearing general staff insignia appeared at midnight with a memo from the general directing him to check over certain operations orders. He offered the sentry a cigaret and, after smoking it, the soldier was taken sick. The officer offered to relieve him. The sentry was back in a few minutes, the sickness gone. The officer sat at a desk writing for some time after that, bade the sentry good night and left. The sentry suspected nothing. In fact, he doesn't know yet there was anything wrong as we're keeping it dark for obvious reasons."

"The safe wasn't crashed, then?"

"Whoever opened that safe must have had the combination, Elton."

"Or a set of very sensitive and skilful fingers, sir. When was the theft discovered?"

"Entirely by accident shortly before noon. The chief of staff chanced to want the Metz plans in the course of preparing certain detailed phases of the operation. The envelop was there, under proper seal, but when the chief of staff opened the envelop it contained only blank sheets of paper."

Elton sat with closed eyes for several moments while he built a clear mental picture of the events.

"Just how important were those plans, sir?" he inquired.

"Important, young man!" exclaimed Rand. "Those are the most important secret papers in the Army today. They are a memorandum from Marshal Foch laying the foundation for the greatest battle in which America ever had a part—the battle of Metz!"

"An invasion of Germany, eh?"

"To be launched November 12 by the 2nd Army, after the 1st Army has gone its limit in the Meuse-Argonne operation. It will be carried as far as possible by December, and preparations made to drive home a crushing blow next year, a blow that will cut Metz off the German military map."

Elton's mind was diverted for the moment from the astounding theft of battle plans by Colonel Rand's words.

"But, sir," he half protested, "since the Boche has lost his drive on Paris and been thrown back across the Vesle, have we any reason to believe the war will last on through the winter into next year?"

The colonel sneered his impatience of such an inquiry. His mind had never questioned the theory of headquarters that the war was barely under way, that America faced crimson years ahead.

"Let's not discuss nonsense, Elton!" he snapped. "We'll be lucky to be through this war in another three years. We've been in action on the Marne; we're pinching off the St. Mihiel salient next month; and we'll stand some heavy losses in the Argonne soon. But Metz is our first great battle. Why, you'd be amazed at the plans new in process for that scrap. We're going to strip every training camp in America of able bodied men. That will give us another two million men, who will be brought across this fall and winter and whipped into shape to buck the steel walls of Metz. Preliminary estimates are that it may cost us five hundred thousand men, over ten times as many as we've lost to date. Work is already started on the supply projects for four million men in the A.E.F. When it comes to carrying the war right into Germany, naturally it's going to cost something. Now do you see the importance of those plans? Do you see what it means to let the Germans get our secret almost as soon as we've gotten the first plans moving?"

"Yes, sir, and your emphasis of the word Metz has also opened my mind to something else," said Elton.

"What now?"

"The real meaning of that cipher mes-

sage. It is clear to me now. Orders to Breisach to get these very plans in complete detail. Orders for the very job he's just successfully pulled on us."

Rand started, but promptly elected not to accept Elton's uncomfortable deduction without qualification.

"A reasonable theory, perhaps," he muttered. "But let us not accept theories as fact. This case is important enough to require consideration of every possibility. The Germans may have planted an operative in our own staff, a reservist who came across with us. That's an equally reasonable deduction, one that we must run down with the greatest care."

"Sir, the work was that of Herr Breisach beyond reasonable doubt," Elton asserted.

"Your reason for that statement?"

"Because, sir, history has simply repeated itself. This same thing happened to the French staff just before the war broke out, and they've traced it since to Breisach."

Rand's jaw dropped and his eyes lost something of their assurance.

"I—I believe I remember that now that you speak of it," he said thickly, then asserted himself again. "Well, the important thing now is not who did it, but where is he, and how to trap him before he gets those papers out of France."

"Yes, sir. May I ask who's in charge of the case and what's been done?"

"I am in personal charge. What I want you to do is nose about the village for any leads you can pick up and be handy in case we get any further ciphers. We've got two good chances of an arrest before tomorrow. First of all, we've got men enough out to prevent any one from leaving the district with secret papers of any kind and to arrest any suspicious characters or stragglers. The second chance, I think I'd better keep to myself."

"I believe you can count upon my discretion, sir," said Elton coolly. "The case is dark enough as it is, if I am to help on it, without withholding anything tangible from me."

"Very well, but remember there's only four of us in on this, and I'll tell you only in the strictest confidence." Rand leaned close and lowered his voice until it was barely audible. "We've let no one know why we have the steel circle on the village. Not even the officers. Don't you see that whoever took those papers intended to replace them?"

"I'd thought of that, sir, when you described the methods used. But I don't expect any attempt to return them now."

"Please remember, Elton, that half the value of those papers to the Germans is in covering up the fact that they've got them. If they could keep it a secret, they'd be able to prepare a frightful surprise for our Army when it makes the initial attack. Even now the staff is trying to determine whether the plans for the Argonne offensive had been tampered with. We find them under their original seal, but we can't be certain they've not been removed and copied."

"My reason for believing the papers will not be returned, sir, is that operatives as skilful as Breisach and his lieutenants will quickly sense the commotion at headquarters and know the loss has been discovered."

"Which is precisely the reason we've kept the information from being circulated even among our own officers," said Rand testily. "As I told you a few moments ago, there's just five officers know and you're one of them. We've put a smoke screen over our patrols around the city, who think they're looking for an absconding quartermaster."

Elton arose to go and suppressed a smile of amusement.

"You can't very well conceal a tense situation from spies of that type, sir," he said quietly. "If Herr Breisach's senses were so dull that he couldn't sense a trap of that kind, he'd be molding in his grave by now. Capable operatives, men who play hide and seek with death for big military stakes, depend upon faculties, upon a sixth sense of intuition which the Colonel fails to reckon with, I fear. Those papers would have come back from Breisach's hands only if their loss had not been

discovered. As it is, sir, those papers have probably been reduced to cipher by now and the originals destroyed. Therefore, the more commotion you can make about them, the better."

"Damnable nonsense, Elton," the colonel snapped. "Your successes in playing hunches have turned your head. This is a case for sane, common sense and cold hard thinking. Next you'll want us to consult a trance medium or a crystal gazer. But, taking up your only coherent statement, why did you say the more noise we make about it the better?"

"Simply because, sir, whoever has those plans, or their cipher equivalent, will not risk leaving the village until the hubbub dies down. There'd be too much danger of a slip-up. If we can hold them in hiding a few days, it may give us a chance to set a trap."

"What plan of procedure would you suggest, if you think you have a better one?"

After several thoughtful moments, Elton shook his head.

"I haven't any idea, Colonel. I'd want to look around a bit, study faces and conditions in the village and see what's in the air. Perhaps I'd be able to discover nothing. You've heard that old saying that the best spies are never caught, and you may be sure that Herr Breisach, the Kaiser's spymaster, comes under the head of best spies."

The colonel reached abruptly for some papers on his desk and indicated with a snort that the interview was ended.

"Go ahead in your own way," he commanded. "I've nothing for you for the present. But don't get out of calling distance in case I want you, and see to it that you keep what I've told you strictly to yourself."

CHAPTER V

THE SPYMASTER

ON LEAVING the counter-espionage office, Elton crossed the parade grounds to the quartermaster's little stone building near the caserne entrance. While he had been talking with Colonel Rand, there had recurred in his mind the two faces that had attracted his attention immediately before his trip to Paris. The effect of those two faces upon him, the jarring sense of their inharmony in the village, might mean merely that his nerves were overwrought, that he was reading suspicion into meaningless shadows. Or they might mean a tangible trail to some of Breisach's intrenched henchmen.

The quartermaster was able promptly to identify the engineer lieutenant from the description Elton gave him. Lieutenant Hardey, corps of engineers, on duty with the area engineer. He consulted Hardey's pay vouchers for further data. These showed that the lieutenant had been on duty at headquarters for three months past, since his arrival from the United States. Also that Hardey had a wife and three dependent children living at Prescott, Arizona, to whom practically all his pay was allotted. The quartermaster remembered that Hardey had increased his family allotment on his last pay voucher, retaining for himself barely enough to meet his mess account.

At the personnel section, where Elton next went, a survey of Hardey's record offered no grounds for suspicion. Appointed from civil life eight months before from Arizona, native born American citizen, forty-six years old. Arrived in France three months before on auxiliary transport *Olympic* as a casual officer. Assigned from Le Havre at his own request as an assistant to the area engineer at headquarters. A wife and three children, one son enlisted in the field artillery and serving overseas. Rating for intelligence: 60, which was no tribute to the officer's mentality.

From headquarters Elton proceeded to Lieutenant Hardey's billet at the edge of town on a pretext of offering him quarters nearer to the caserne. That would give him opportunity to study Hardey at close range. But the French woman who answered his knock explained with many shrugs that monsieur the lieutenant was very sick with the influenza. This report

was promptly verified by the post surgeon who had attended the patient two days before and found him feverish, with a temperature slightly over 100°.

"A mild case," said the surgeon, "and I permitted him to remain at his billet where he seemed to think he would be more comfortable. He will be about again by tomorrow or the next day."

Although the records gave Hardey a clearance, Elton decided upon a personal closeup of the officer before dismissing him finally from consideration. And while Hardey's elimination from the case doubtless would remove the Frenchman, Elton proceeded on foot to the shop dealing in instruments of precision on Rue Chamarandes, taking with him another compass to be repaired. The man he sought was not at the place and from a peglegged clerk he finally elicited the information that monsieur was confined to his chamber above the store with influenza. Yes, monsieur Linois had been ill for two days, requiring the services of a doctor, the clerk advised.

Elton's stride lengthened and his pace quickened the moment he left the shop on Rue Chamerandes. He went direct to the *prefecture* where he asked for the list of French doctors in the village. The list was a very meager one. Just two doctors remained, both of whom were too feeble for military service. The first of these whom Elton visited turned out to be the one who had attended Monsieur Linois.

"Not a severe case, monsieur," said the doctor. "A slight fever and not an alarming temperature. He will be able to leave his bed very shortly."

Another coincidence? Elton, as he returned to headquarters, recalled that it was the sight of Hardey emerging from M. Linois' shop that had brought his suspicion of the two faces to a focus in his mind. Now they were both down with the influenza, both taken to their beds by doctors' orders on the day preceding the theft of the battle orders. His pulse quickened as he reflected upon what he had discovered. Though it was possible enough that both should fall victim to the flu epidemic raging in the village, the facts lent substance to his suspicions. He hurried to the office of the surgeon in rear of the main building at the caserne.

"Is it possible, Lieutenant," he asked the medical officer, "for men to contract influenza with premeditation and have it develop at a specific date?"

"A very simple matter, Captain," said the doctor. "An inoculation will do the trick in no time."

"A man with influenza can get up and move about actively if he has a mind to?"

"Certainly, if the case isn't too severe." The surgeon smiled broadly at the question. "Were you looking for a good alibi to get out of a bit of hard duty?"

"No, not at all," said Elton soberly. "But it would provide an excellent alibi, wouldn't it, for any one who happened to need one?"

From the surgeon's office, Elton hurried to the large records building, identified the particular Private Hardey who enlisted from Prescott, Arizona, found from the station list section that Private Hardey's unit was in a training area northeast of Gerardmer in the Vosges Mountains, and wired a peremptory order to the soldier's division commander that Private Hardey was to report immediately to headquarters.

Then, with an amused smile at the now darkened second floor of the main headquarters building where Colonel Rand and three trusted officers had taken up their clandestine all night vigil for the return of the missing battle plans, he drove to his billet at Madame Bourchère's château in the outskirts and turned in for the night.

THE SUN was streaming in at his window when Elton awakened with a start in the morning and leaped out of bed. A moment later there was a heavy rap at the door and the cheerful voice of old Eustache' Jules, man-of-all-work at the château, announced in French that it was six hours of the clock. Elton ordered his customary *petit dejeuner* of coffee and rolls brought up to him in order to save

time while he dressed and shaved. The day promised much and he wished to waste no part of it.

He was strapping on his Sam Browne belt when there was a crash of silver and china in the hall outside his door. It was followed by a heavy thud. He listened for the muttered voice of Jules, who must have stumbled and dropped the breakfast tray as he left the stairway. Hearing no further sound, he stepped to his door.

The Frenchman lay sprawled on the floor, one leg doubled under his body, an arm outstretched in the position in which it had held the tray of dishes. A glance at the figure told Elton that the man was dead. A touch of the wrist confirmed the fact. Madame Bourchère, attracted by the commotion, ran up the stairs and screamed at the sight of the stark eyes of the dead man.

"Poor Jules, he has had a stroke!" she cried. "Poor Jules, and a minute ago he looked the picture of health." She turned a tragic face to Elton and calmed herself. "One can never know, monsieur, how near is the hand of death."

Elton bent over the body. He saw that there had been no convulsion, no frothing. Old Jules had not struggled after death clutched his heart. From his posture he must have been dead before his body hit the floor. His face and muscles told the story of an instantaneous paralysis of vital functions, a snuffing out as swift as the snapping of an electric light current from an incandescent.

"You say, madame, that Jules was in good health when he left the *cuisine?*" Elton inquired.

"But yes, *Monsieur le Capitaine.* He was well and with a smile on his face. Never has he complained of being ill."

"Was there any one else in the kitchen this morning, madame, or did Jules receive visitors last night, or during the night?"

"*Jamais, monsieur.* No one."

"You made the coffee as usual this morning with your own hands?"

"Yes, monsieur, as usual. Jules came from your room and said you were ready. Your coffee was steaming on the fire and I poured it and told him to hurry up with it before it cooled."

"Then you are certain, madame, that Jules had no callers this morning, or that no one was prowling in your *cuisine* during the night?"

"I am positive, monsieur. There was—" she paused in sudden recollection—"there was no one except the officer who came a few minutes ago to say he wished a word with you. I told him you were not yet out of bed and he said it did not matter, he would see you later at your bureau."

"You admitted him to the kitchen, madame?"

"It was to the door at the rear he called, monsieur. Yes, I asked him to enter. He stood by the fire for a moment and left."

"Can you describe the officer to me?"

"Yes. A man much older than you, *mon Capitaine,* with a face long and very serious. A lieutenant, and at his collar two small castles of bronze."

"The insignia of the corps of engineers, madame. I think I know the man and what he wanted of me. Did you notice how long he stood beside your stove, and were you close to him at the time?"

Madame Bourchère's face was again ashen and there was a growing terror in her eyes as she suddenly caught the import of Elton's queries.

"I do not understand, monsieur. Do you mean—?"

"Exactly, Madame Bourchère. Please calm yourself. But while the visitor stood by the fire he placed a deadly poison in the coffee urn."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" cried madame. "But who would wish to murder poor Jules, since not in the whole world did he have an enemy?"

"It was a slight miscalculation, madame," Elton replied gravely. "The cyanide of potassium was intended for me. Unhappily for old Jules but luckily for me, Jules took a sip of my coffee as he came to the landing in front of my door. Otherwise I would be dead in my room at this instant."

The purr of a car outside told Elton that a driver had called from headquarters to take him to his desk. He led madame downstairs, directed her to the home of a neighbor, and entered the auto, finding a seat out of sight of prying eyes on the floor of the tonneau, much to the driver's perplexity. As the car started for the caserne, he pulled himself together against the unsettling tremor that had followed the tragedy of old Jules and his own close brush with death. His face was set, his eyes level and determined.

"You are a fast worker, Herr Breisach," he muttered aloud to himself. "But the cards ran against you this morning and I know where to find your trail now."

CHAPTER VI

A RAT IN A TRAP

ON REACHING the caserne, he emerged from the floor of the car and hurried to his cubbyhole office to find that his telegram of the night before had been most promptly and effectively obeyed. The soldier from the Vosges Mountains had arrived by auto from his division at daybreak and sat waiting for him. A lad of twenty in a fever of bewilderment at the strange summons of the night before.

Elton shed no light upon the reasons for the call. After verifying the soldier's identity by careful questioning, he drove with him direct to the billet of the engineer lieutenant. The French woman who answered the door said that monsieur was not yet recovered from the influenza, but Elton ignored her protests and pushed his way into the house.

"Instruct the lieutenant," he ordered, "that a senior officer wishes to see him at once on a matter of official business."

"*Oui, oui, monsieur.*" The woman yielded without further protest and ran up the stairs cackling her instructions excitedly to her billet guest.

In a few minutes the officer came down stairs in full uniform. At sight of the captain he executed a clumsy salute, the kind of salute that Lieutenant Hardey would be expected to make.

"You wanted to see me about something, Captain?" he inquired in a contained voice.

Elton's first estimate of the man was confirmed as he looked at him searchingly. A powerful, brutal face, the face of a man of most positive qualities. The large beakish nose, the heavy, slightly underslung jaw, the high cheekbones and small, close set, beady eyes ill suited the thin, obsequious voice in which he spoke and the studied humility of his manner. But if he recognized Elton, or had ever seen him before, there was not the slightest indication of that fact now.

Elton made no effort to conceal his own grim humor.

"Lieutenant, you were stationed for a short time at Le Havre before coming to headquarters, I believe," he said in a brusk official voice.

"Why, yes—yes, sir. I was there two weeks, sir."

"I am Captain Elton, Military Intelligence, and I have brought here this soldier in the thought that you may be able to identify him, Lieutenant. Do you recognize him?"

The fellow made a careful appraisal of the soldier and shook his head.

"I was not with troops at Le Havre, sir," he replied.

"Then you have never seen this man before in your life?"

The lieutenant took several moments for a further study of the soldier, although Elton sensed that he was utilizing the time in which to estimate the situation.

"No, sir, Captain," he said finally. "The man's a stranger to me to the best of my knowledge. But my memory for faces isn't what it used to be years ago, sir."

"Then let me introduce you," said Elton, baring his teeth in a cynical smile. "This soldier is Private Theodore Harold Hardey, son of Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Hardey, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army."

Not even the incalculable *sang froid* in which the man had fortified himself was equal to the sudden spring of Elton's trap. He recoiled involuntarily and the blood left his face. But he made his choice of a way out instantly and his right hand snapped to the belt under his blouse.

Elton's mind worked with equal swiftness. He drove across the room and struck the other squarely on the jaw with the full force of his right arm. But the blow did not overcome the rugged vitality of the suspect. The fellow staggered, righted himself and got his pistol clear of his uniform. Elton crashed him against the wall at the same moment, and caught the pistol arm at the wrist.

In the struggle that followed, Elton found himself clutching muscles of steel. It took all his strength to keep his antagonist from maneuvering the muzzle inward. He spoke in a calm voice to Private Hardey who was dancing excitedly about the room.

"Hardey, you will wrench this pistol away while I hold his wrist," he commanded.

The suspect threw his prodigious strength into a frenzied struggle to free himself, at the same time bellowing his rage and attempting to kick with his ponderous feet. But with the barrel of the pistol for leverage, Private Hardey quickly wrenched the weapon free. As Elton released his foeman and stepped back, the other launched a savage rush at him, only to have Elton stop him with another smashing blow to the jaw, delivered from close range. When the daze cleared from the fellow's eyes, it was to see the captain standing in front of him with leveled service pistol. For some time the prisoner stood blinking in an effort to collect his wits.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance here in my billet?" he demanded in the uncertain voice of a man who stalls for time.

"Just a little social call," said Elton with a smile. "As you know, regulations stipulate that social calls should be returned promptly. Therefore, I've lost no time returning the call you made at my billet a few minutes before six o'clock this morning."

"Never saw you before in my life," the fellow muttered thickly.

"But you'll see a great deal of me in the next few hours," Elton replied. "We're going over to headquarters now for an interview, and please remember that my trigger finger is a bit jerky this morning after going without my breakfast. So don't start anything *en route*."

WHEN he had landed the counterfeit Hardey in a barred room at the guardhouse, Elton went outside for an interview with Private Hardey. From that soldier he learned that Lieutenant Hardey had written home every few days, but always on a form postal which required merely a penciled check of appropriate sentences printed on the card. So they had supposed that he was at the front line and unable to write a letter in his own hand. Hardey said the last letter he got from his father was from Le Havre in which he said he had just arrived in France a few days before and was awaiting assignment. Thereafter, silence.

With this information, Elton re-entered the guardhouse. The prisoner had entirely recovered his self-possession but had abandoned any further attempt to ape the humble demeanor of a middle aged lieutenant. His animal-like eyes looked out from their caverns with a crafty gleam and there was a touch of defiance in the set of his thin mouth.

"It is customary, I believe," said the counterfeit Hardey in a stout voice, "to inform a prisoner at once what he is charged with?"

"I was in hope," said Elton, "that you weren't going to equivocate. Bickering will do you no good. Frankness is the only thing that can help you now."

The prisoner's warped mouth bared a set of discolored teeth.

"How am I to be frank unless I know what the charge is!" he sneered.

"We have a choice of several charges against you," said Elton. "Any of them are serious enough to warrant a bit of caution and common sense on your part."

"Striking my superior officer, I suppose you mean, Captain?"

"Nothing as simple as that. Besides, your superior officer remembers distinctly having struck the first blow. Also the last."

"Let's hear the worst, then."

"First, we have a charge of murder for you," Elton replied evenly. "Second, a charge of attempted murder. Last, but not least, the charge of being a German spy in American uniform."

The prisoner heard these three damning charges without the slightest emotion. He sat in silence for a moment, then smiled cryptically.

"Who am I supposed to have murdered, please?" he inquired.

"Lieutenant Hardey. You waylaid him at Le Havre when he landed there as a casual, stole his identification card and private effects, and intrenched yourself in his place. You might have gotten away with that except for two things. First, the American counter-espionage service is not so dumb as you Germans seem to think. Second, Lieutenant Hardey had a son in France, which made it a simple matter to trap you."

"An interesting deduction," said the prisoner with an amused smile. "Now about the second charge."

"It's really just your tough luck that you didn't succeed in that attempt. But the butler got thirsty on the way up with my breakfast and reaped the full benefit of the potion you planted for me."

The prisoner winced slightly at this statement but quickly recovered his mirth.

"And the third charge?"

"You are plainly a spy in the service of the German government. Otherwise you wouldn't have committed the first two crimes. You came here to get certain battle plans. You got them, or at least your crew got them. You are part of Herr Breisach's gang. In fact, if it were not for one thing I might suspect you of being Herr Breisach himself."

"Go ahead and give your imagination full play while you're about it. One of your charges is no more absurd than the others."

"But the reason I don't think you are Herr Breisach," Elton cut at him, "is that I credit him with a considerably higher order of intelligence than you have shown. My only surprise is that he would have a mere, clumsy thug in his personal entourage."

The thrust struck home. The other's heavy jaw snapped shut, the light in his eyes deepened into a malignant gleam. But he recovered himself without an outburst.

"If you have finished with your insults, I have something to say, Captain," he said calmly. "Something that may relieve you of some of your conceit."

"It would be better for you to confine your remarks to the charges," said Elton. "Bearing in mind that your only chance of escaping the gallows is to supply us with some useful information on your friend Breisach's whereabouts."

"I would prefer to say this," said the prisoner bluntly. "Your murder charge is worthless without a *corpus delicti*. You can't convict a man of murder without a body to prove there's been a murder. Your second charge would appear to need something more than an unsupported statement that I visited your billet. As for your third charge, well, go ahead and prove it. I still contend that I'm an innocent victim."

"Perhaps you will be able to show how you came here, who you are, and explain your past movements."

The prisoner gave a short, strident laugh.

"Why should I do that?" he sneered. "You know as well as I do that in American law the burden of proof is upon the State. It isn't up to me to prove my innocence. It's up to you to prove my guilt, and from now on, I'm saying nothing." The fellow laughed aloud again, in de-

fiance. "I am now going to utter the last words you'll ever get from my lips—and they are, that you can go to the devil!"

Having taken refuge in silence, the prisoner was not to be shaken thereafter out of his resolution. Elton plied him with questions. Not so much as a shake of the head in response. Elton baited him with a proposition whereby, subject to approval of the American commander, a commutation of sentence to imprisonment would be exchanged for information of Breisach.

"This is your last chance to speak," Elton warned him finally. "If you don't tell what you know, you'll be hanged as quick as a court-martial can sit on your case."

There was no response to the threat. The prisoner sat looking stolidly at Elton, with no outward indication that he heard the questions, but with his thin lips tightly pressed together. Elton left the guardhouse only to return in an hour. It was his thought that the fellow's stubborn will might yield in time, that his very silence betrayed a weakness, a fear that he might be misled into a bargain against his secret oath of allegiance. A second and third time Elton returned. The prisoner's face had become chalky, his lips so tightly pressed together that the mouth was a purple line. A sight of weakening, Elton told himself. If the German were not uncertain of himself, he would not hide his fears in a blind silence.

On his fifth visit, shortly before retreat parade in the caserne, he was met by the non-com in charge of the guardhouse. There was a strained look in the Sergeant's face.

"You'll never get that bird to talk now, sir," said the Sergeant.

"What makes you think so, Sergeant?" Elton inquired.

"I'm sorry, sir. But while we wasn't looking, he got his waist belt around his neck," the sergeant reported. "Guess he felt himself slipping, sir, but anyhow he sure made good before we saw what was going on."

CHAPTER VII

SENHOR ALJEZUR

WITH Herr Breisach's trail thus effectually closed by the desperate expediency of a loyal henchman who feared his own tongue more than death, Elton returned to his office to debate the question of reporting developments to Colonel Rand. He quickly decided against such a course for the time being and set out shortly after sundown for the Rue Chamerandes. Cases affecting French civilians or soldiers ordinarily were referred to the French military police, and he knew the colonel would insist upon that procedure.

The clerk in the little French shop reported that monsieur was still in his chamber with the influenza and wished to see no one. But Elton ignored the clerk's protests and resolutely mounted the stairs to find the object of his inquiry sitting up in bed with a book in his lap.

The man regarded the intrusion with owlish blinks of his unemotional blue eyes and, upon recognizing the American uniform, politely motioned Elton to a chair.

"You are the gentleman whose compass I repaired, monsieur?" he said pleasantly. "My work, I trust it gave satisfaction."

"A compass may sometimes be very useful, monsieur, in showing one the lay of the land," said Elton insinuatingly.

His eyes were searching the fellow's face. His manner was intentionally menacing. He was determined to waste no time in satisfying himself whether or not this was another henchman of Herr Breisach, as he strongly suspected.

"Indeed yes, monsieur," agreed the other.

The humor in the other's eyes as he said this nettled Elton. It was as if the other had parried his thrust deftly and was laughing at him, at the clumsiness of his technique. But again the smile was as elusive as the fellow's words, as impossible of positive interpretation.

"I am Captain Elton, of the Military Intelligence," Elton announced. "I am

here officially to ask you a few questions." He added pointedly. "A number of my men are waiting below for me."

"Ah, but will you not invite them to enter, monsieur," the other pleaded. "I am Monsieur Linois, accounted an expert in instruments of precision. Also my reputation for hospitality would suffer greatly, monsieur, if it were ever told that American soldiers were compelled to stand up about my poor billet."

"Let's not be facetious, monsieur," said Elton. "My purpose in coming here doesn't lend itself to humor as you may know very well."

"A thousand pardons, monsieur, but I did not speak in jest. But since you will not ask your friends to join me, will you not please tell me how I may serve?"

"First, I wish to ask you how long you have been in the village?"

M. Linois' humor, the certainty of his poise, were unchanged and he answered without hesitation—

"A matter of ten days ago, monsieur, a fact of record in the bureau of the police in the village."

"You came here from what place and for what purpose?"

"From Paris, I came here, monsieur. And, to save you further questions, to Paris I came from the Pyrenees, and to the Pyrenees from Spain. My purpose in coming here is rather a personal one which I would rather not discuss."

"You are acquainted with a Lieutenant Hardey, as he called himself, who wore the uniform of an engineer officer?"

"I know of no such officer, monsieur. But many Americans come to my shop which I have leased for my own good reasons."

"When, monsieur, did you last see Herr Breisach or receive orders from him?"

Elton shot this question at him, but the fellow's face did not respond, nor did he pause to weigh the question before making reply.

"The name sounds German, Monsieur Elton," said M. Linois. "It has a familiar ring to it. It seems so strange that you should ask me when I received orders from such a fellow as that, unless you suspect me of being a spy."

"You have it right. That is precisely what I suspect," said Elton quietly. "I have suspected it for several days and now I'm becoming more convinced of it every minute."

M. Linois' amusement became unmistakeable. He offered no denial, no protest. Elton, puzzled by the fellow's evident certainty of himself, slipped his hand into the pocket of his breeches where he had placed a small caliber automatic against surprise.

"A rather serious charge, is it not, my Captain? Please will you tell me the reason for your suspicion?"

"Glad to oblige, monsieur. You pretend to be a tinkerer of compasses. You are nothing of the sort. You have convinced me you are a man of unusual experience in the world. Your French is that of Paris of the better class. Your refusal to be startled by the things I have said to you proves that you are used to meeting emergencies. I must ask you to get out of bed and drop down to the caserne with me, and I particularly warn you against any attempt at trickery."

"*Bien, monsieur*, well analyzed!" exclaimed M. Linois. He laughed heartily and looked at the dial of his wrist watch. "I could not have done better myself. But may I ask that you wait only another five minutes. It will be a very great favor as I am ill with influenza and do not wish to expose myself unnecessarily."

"Influenza of your own choosing, if my deductions are correct. Do you wish to come now of your choice, or shall I call my men?"

"My Captain, you do yourself great injustice when you speak of your men," said M. Linois pointedly. "The rather awkward way in which you introduced the subject told me you had no men outside. I observe, too, that your hand caresses a hidden weapon and that you have me point-blank. So I will not be foolish. I read in your mind that you suspect a trap and think I play for time. So very true, monsieur. But it is of your embarrass-

ment I think. It would pain me deeply to humiliate so gallant an officer."

The other's cutting analysis caused Elton to flinch. The enigma of M. Linois' conduct was deepened by his serene assurance, which was plainly not a pose. Elton arose.

"Come, dress yourself, monsieur!" he commanded. "We will continue our discussion at headquarters."

"Ah, barely in time to save us both embarrassment," the other exclaimed with a smile. "If you are of the same mind in another minute, I'll be glad to leave my sick bed and go with you."

THERE were footsteps on the stairs. Elton, as he caught the sound stepped across the room where he faced both the door and M. Linois' bed. There was a light rap at the door and at M. Linois' invitation the door opened to admit a French officer. Elton started perceptibly as he recognized the visitor.

"Fortunately you are on time, Lieutenant Le Berceaux," said the man on the bed. "May I present Captain Elton of the American Service?"

The French secret service operative saluted and smiled a cordial welcome.

"The great pleasure, my Captain," he said. "I understood you to say you were tied to your desk with cipher, or I should have called to see you on my way here."

"There has been a very slight misunderstanding, the nature of which it is unpleasant to relate," said Linois. "Captain Elton has very aptly sensed that I am really not M. Linois, an obscure shopkeeper. I hesitated to introduce myself, knowing you would be here so soon and could do so more convincingly."

"*Pardon,*" said Le Berceaux with a bow. "I presumed you were friends by now. Captain Elton, permit me the honor to present our distinguished associate, the Senhor Major Aljezur of the Portuguese secret service."

For only an instant did Elton stand speechless. Then he turned to his intended victim with evident embarrassment and executed a most profound French bow.

"Your pardon a thousand times, my Senhor Major," he apologized. "I see very clearly what you meant now when you so graciously tried to save me embarrassment. But that doesn't lessen the embarrassment I feel at thinking of what a terrible blunder I might have made."

"Let us forget it, my Captain," said Aljezur with a generous toss of his hand. "We are interested, after all, in the same cause, the affair of Herr Breisach. Except for the influenza, I had hoped to have the rascal completely under my control by now."

"I have some important leads and must be returning to Paris immediately," Le Berceaux spoke up. "I sent word that I would call on my way back from Neufchâteau this evening, my Senhor Major. Is there anything I can do for your comfort, further than to wish you a speedy recovery?"

"Nothing, my Lieutenant," said Aljezur. "I hope to be out and about by tomorrow, and as soon as I have completed my survey of the village, I shall report to Colonel Ourq at Paris. In another week we should have the problem of Breisach well in hand."

Le Berceaux, who had seated himself beside Aljezur's bed, stood up.

"Time presses, Senhor Major," he said. "I am glad to find your illness it is not serious."

"Thank you, my Lieutenant," said Aljezur. He lighted a cigaret and extended his silver case casually to Le Berceaux. "It has been disagreeable to be confined at such a time."

"May I?" inquired Le Berceaux as he accepted four cigarets from Aljezur's case.

"Take them all, my Lieutenant," Aljezur urged. "I have a liberal supply of the weed."

"*Merci, bien,*" said Le Berceaux as he emptied the case. "It will save me pausing on the way to Paris to purchase a fresh supply. And now, *au revoir*, my Senhor Major. I wish you a speedy recovery."

As Le Berceaux turned to take his leave, Elton also bowed his farewell to Aljezur.

"But now that we are acquainted, you must not leave so soon," protested Aljezur. "There are many things we should be able to discuss to our mutual profit."

"I, too, am free to return to Paris," Elton replied. "Lieutenant Le Berceaux and I were about to begin work our together when I was recalled to headquarters." He turned to Le Berceaux. "If you will give me a lift, Lieutenant, I am in a humor for that visit under Paris if we deem it necessary."

"A great pleasure to have you ride with me, my Captain," said Le Berceaux. "My car is waiting in the street below."

The victim of influenza called out a friendly warning to them as they reached the door.

"But take no unnecessary risks, *mes enfants*," he cried. "Herr Breisach's trail is not a pleasant one to follow if he should happen to suspect that you were after him."

The road from the Chamarandes to Paris passed close to the American headquarters caserne and Le Berceaux obligingly agreed to pass that way while Elton got his musette bag and reported his departure officially. Elton also took time to run across the street to the quarters of his faithful asistant, Sergeant Walters.

"Sir, I was thinking the Cap'n'd forgot me entirely," said the veteran non-com in an injured voice. "And me smelling something strange in the air this past week."

"Well, I've got a real job for you now, Walters. It may get me in more kinds of trouble than I'll ever be able to get out of, but I'll take all the blame on my own shoulders, no matter what happens."

Walters' gray-green eyes lighted up with enthusiasm as he received terse instructions from the captain.

"Have no fear, sir!" he responded. "If it's the Cap'n's orders, that's all I want to know, and I'll sure put it across right away as quick as I can get a squad together."

CHAPTER VIII

ELTON BORROWS A CIGARET

THROUGH the ride to Paris, Elton and Le Berceaux discussed the trail of Breisach, Elton asserting his willingness to risk once more a visit under Paris, or take any other chance that would land the dreaded Breisach in the Allied net. The Frenchman at first attempted to dissuade him from such a venture, but finally yielded to Elton's determination.

Elton was clearly nervous over the adventure as evidenced by the fact that he smoked one cigaret after another. By the time they reached Troyes, his supply was gone. As they passed Provins, he searched vainly through his uniform for another cigaret and turned to Le Berceaux."

"May I trouble you for a cigaret, my Lieutenant?" he requested. "I did not realize that my own supply was running out. I smoke far too much when I am under tension."

"But I have only the French tobacco, my Captain." Le Berceaux protested. "I know full well how little they please you Americans. But in a short time we shall be in Paris and shall drive by the Hôtel Meurice while you renew your supply."

"I really enoy the French cigarets for a change, my Lietenant," Elton replied. "I have never agreed altogether with those of our Service who contend that they have the taste of chopped cabbage."

Le Berceaux took from his tunic a leather tobacco case and extended it, at the same time flicking a flame into his war briquet. Elton accepted the light, gave a single grateful puff and resumed the conversation earnestly.

"If Colonel Ourq deems it necessary, I shall go to the Strindheim nest tonight," he said. "Even if Von Strindheim did recognize me, the fellow's incalculable conceit would cause him to dally with me long enough to give me a chance to get the upper hand with my pistol."

"You mean to ask the advice of Colonel Ourq, my Captain?"

"Don't you think that would be advisable? His experience should be most

valuable, and besides I have my instructions now that I must not make a move in this case while in Paris without first consulting your service."

"Perhaps it is wise," assented Le Berceaux. "But Colonel Ourq probably will have retired to his apartment by the hour we reach Paris, my Captain. It would delay us if you really mean to try your hand tonight."

"I have the colonel's own directions that I am to call him at any hour of the day or night while we are working on this case."

"*Bien, monsieur,*" replied Le Berceaux.

On entering Paris through the Porte de Bercy, they drove by mutual consent to the bureau of the secret service in the Place de la Concorde. On entering, they were greeted by Lieutenant d'Auteuil, who advised that Colonel Ourq had gone to his home, but was available in half an hour if the facts justified disturbing him.

"It perhaps could wait until the morning," suggested Le Berceaux. "Or it may serve the same purpose if we lay the matter before you, my dear D'Auteuil, for your approval."

"I have the full authority to act in the absence of my chief," said D'Auteuil. "He turned inquiringly to Elton. "You may speak to me, my Captain, with the same freedom that you would speak with my colonel himself, as I once told you on another occasion."

"It is so grave a matter, Lieutenant d'Auteuil," said Elton, "one affecting my reputation as well as my life, that I feel justified in talking only to your colonel. I will deem it a great privilege, however, to have both you and Lieutenant Le Berceaux present when I talk with Colonel Ourq."

"Very well, my Captain, I shall send for the colonel instantly," D'Auteuil agreed.

He promptly dispatched Le Berceaux' staff car for Colonel Ourq and seated Elton and Le Berceaux in the counter-espionage chieftain's private office to wait. Elton immediately excused himself from the room and asked for the use of a desk in the unoccupied room where he might prepare his report of the day's events for his headquarters.

"It will free my hands of routine," he explained, "so that I will be ready for our more important work."

IT WAS not until D'Auteuil, half an hour later, had twice called to tell him of Colonel Ourq's presence that Elton rose from the desk, placed the papers over which he worked in his pocket and followed the operative into Colonel Ourq's office. Ourq was heavy eyed and in no happy humor at the break of his rest, but he looked up with expectant interest at Elton's arrival.

"Something of the greatest importance, my Captain?" said Ourq, in a voice that said nothing less would have warranted this midnight intrusion upon a high officer's rest.

"Of the very greatest importance, sir," affirmed Elton gravely.

"A clew to Herr Breisach? I believe it is upon that case you have been assigned."

"Yes, sir," Elton's voice was sharp and his face lined in spite of his effort at composure. "That and a matter of even greater importance. Treason in your own service, sir!"

Ourq's heavy eyes popped open and his jaw snapped shut.

"What do you mean, Captain?" he demanded. He contained himself with an effort. "That is a most serious statement to make lightly."

"I do not make the charge lightly, nor without the evidence, Colonel Ourq. It is my very unhappy duty to inform you that Lieutenant Le Berceaux is an agent of the Imperial German government."

"Monsieur!"

The voices of Ourq and D'Auteuil rang out in protest. They stood glaring at Elton, stupefied by the astounding charge. Elton looked back with steady eyes. No one looked at Le Berceaux.

"I have the proof," said Elton. He brought from his blouse an envelop and took from it a small slip of thin paper that

was covered with small black dots. "This leaves no room for doubt."

He handed it to Ourq, who merely looked at it without seeming to understand its purpose. Elton took from his musette bag a magnifying glass and handed it to the colonel.

"The cipher of the Boche," muttered Ourq as he held the paper under the glass. "But your charge, monsieur? What do you mean!"

"Intercepted," said Elton. "I got it from Lieutenant Le Berceaux, who was acting as an agent for a henchman of Breisach. Let me explain very briefly. Le Berceaux came to headquarters where I had a suspect under observation. He insisted the man was Senhor Aljezur of the secret service of Portugal. Perhaps I would have been fooled except for one thing. A very small thing, but who knows better than you, Colonel Ourq, how eloquent are trifles. When Le Berceaux accepted from Aljezur not one but four cigarets, there came to my mind the fact that he once crushed thoughtlessly between his thumb and finger a cigaret I had given him, and at a time of tension when a man given to the use of tobacco would have lighted it. So, on the way to Paris, I managed to get one of Aljezur's cigarets from Le Berceaux. And, as I expected, I removed the paper wrapping to find inside the Boche cipher."

Le Berceaux had leaped to his feet at the first charge, but uttered no word. He stood with his expressionless face frozen straight ahead of him, a man transfixed, who neither hears nor sees.

"I had the key to this cipher before." Elton took a large sheet of paper from his pocket and gave it to the colonel. "You may verify my work for yourself."

Without glancing at Le Berceaux, Colonel Ourq dropped heavily into his chair and, with a hand that trembled visibly, set about transcribing the tiny symbols upon a large sheet of paper, writing under each cipher group its English equivalent.

GA	KD	KD	GA	IA	GC	KC	JC	IC	KA	KD	GF	—
A	T	T	A	C	K	O	N	M	E	T	Z	—

As he completed this first telltale phrase, he swept the cipher from his desk and leaped to his feet in sudden furious consternation.

"*Mon Dieu!* The plans of Metz have been betrayed!" he roared. He turned to Le Berceaux, his jaw sagging as he searched the other's face. "Speak up, Le Berceaux. Explain to us that there has been some horrible mistake."

But the French operative made no reply. His eyes remained on the wall in a vacant stare. He collapsed into a chair with a moan of anguish. Elton saw that Le Berceaux's face had broken with his body. The man's face was lined and lifeless, the face of a very old and broken man.

"Le Berceaux, in the name of *le bon Dieu*, speak out and clear your honor of this hideous charge!"

Ourq's voice was one of pleading. Even with the evidence before him, he was groping blindly for some last ray of hope that it was all a frightful mistake. But slowly his mind accepted as final the staggering truth. Le Berceaux, the trusted Le Berceaux, a traitor! As his mind adjusted itself to this monstrous truth, Ourq did not give way to wrath. He sat merely looking at the traitor through painful moments, and when he spoke it was in a measured voice that carried with it a note far more ominous than rage.

"There is one last duty you can perform for yourself, monsieur," he said. "And for the honor of the service."

The colonel's words stirred Berceaux's mind from its stupor.

"I am ready, my Colonel," he said in a broken whisper.

"But first, I demand to know from your own lips the reason for this black treachery against those who have loved you like a brother, Le Berceaux," Ourq said feelingly.

A sob broke from the traitor's throat, but he made no effort to break his gaping silence. Ourq pressed him with growing impatience and finally dragged the story of his downfall from him a few muttered words at a time. It was two years before the war that the Germans played upon Le

Berceaux's weakness for luxury, offered him a million francs for some minor service, and thereafter held him to their bidding by threats of exposure. He had taken their money in the first place believing there would be no war, and with no thoughts of the demands that would be made upon him. Once in their trap, he had been forced deeper and deeper into the intrigue until there was no way out.

"And Breisach, you will tell us where we will find him now, monsieur," Ourq commanded.

For the first time since he had found himself at the end of the trail, Le Berceaux's gaze dropped from the wall of the room and met Colonel Ourq's face.

"My Colonel!" he cried. "Oh, how gladly do I tell you what you ask. When you arrest the Senhor Aljezur, it is Herr Breisach you will have. They are one. But even now it may be too late, my Colonel."

Colonel Ourq rose abruptly.

"I am glad you have done this service, Le Berceaux," he said in a dry, official voice. "For that France shall reward you. Your illustrious grandpère placed the name of Le Berceaux upon a pedestal from which your infamy shall not drag it. I am not even going to the formality of placing you under arrest. *Adieu, monsieur.*"

Ourq turned sharply on his heel and caught Elton by the arm. At the same time he gripped D'Auteuil by the arm and escorted the two officers from the room. They had reached the outer door of the bureau before Elton sensed that Ourq really meant to leave Le Berceaux behind, unguarded, free to escape. He freed his arm and confronted the Colonel.

"But, sir," he protested, "there is no possible justification for letting—"

His words were smothered by a sharp detonation. There was the sound of an object striking the floor, the same grim sound Elton had heard that morning when old Jules paused for a sip of coffee at the billet door. Then a groan of mortal anguish, and silence.

"Le Berceaux must have been cleaning his pistol," said Ourq coolly. "An accident, beyond doubt, as we shall formally report."

He lighted his pipe and led the way out into the Place de la Concorde.

"But for the present we have more important matters to concern us," he added tensely. "If luck is with us, we may be able to reach Breisach before he makes another of his miraculous escapes."

"There is no hurry on that score, sir," said Elton. "As we were leaving headquarters, I sent a very dependable sergeant to gather Senhor Aljezur in, which means that Herr Breisach is already in our guardhouse."

An Unusual Tale of the Nigerian Mahogany Forests

THE KING

TOWARD the end of the second day Cartwright herded his native carriers along the bush path to Balami and roundly cursed the luck that had brought him there.

The path slithered like a snake into the smothering shadows of the jungle—an apparently endless ribbon that seemed to have been drawn at random through the drab green mangrove curtain that hung over all the Benin country; and somewhere along this path was Balami, the place where Benton had so suddenly and mysteriously died.

Cartwright, who had been perfectly satisfied to remain as Marsden & Company's beach clerk at Warri, had received orders to "take over" Balami. He was, therefore, dragging his complaining feet along so many burning West African miles to slip them into a dead man's shoes.

However, Cartwright was not afraid. Not at all. He was perspiring like a stevedore, his mouth was as dry and as dusty as an empty trading beach water tank in December, the ache in his feet had passed beyond all printable comment, and his humor was correspondingly vile; but he was quite sure he was not afraid. Nothing like that. And he had, in fact, been chosen to take over Balami because he was the kind of man who was likely to remain alive and well under any circumstances anywhere.

At Siluko, where he had parted company with his last contact with men of his own color, Nelson, the firm's agent there, had said to him:

"You can trust this string of carriers I've taken on for you, and Coffee, your headman, who has come down from Balami to meet you, is about the best in the business hereabouts. Until you reach Balami, leave everything to Coffee, then see Saldor. Saldor is your head overseer.

IN BALAMI

By ROBERT SIMPSON

He's part Lagos-man and part Hausa, and in Balami he comes pretty close to being a king; but he knows mahogany and he'll give you the hang of the place and of your new job. Is that clear?"

"I think so. Does this fellow Saldor have to be handled with gloves? You say he's pretty much of a king—"

Nelson had nodded and added dryly: "He thinks he is and that's just as bad, or even worse. Saldor is Balami and Balami is Saldor's. We are just his treasury department."

"I see," Cartwright had said discreetly. "All right. So don't forget that we send a white man in to supervise the working of a mahogany concession principally for moral effect. So, above everything else, don't make your gangs restless and uncomfortable by nosing around trying to find out how and why poor Benton died."

"No?"

"No. Keep your eyes open, but keep your mouth shut—even to Saldor, unless he talks first."

"Don't you want to know what happened to Benton?"

Nelson had smiled a thin, dry and rather twisted smile.

"Don't think about it. Your assignment is to go in there to Balami and get the logs floating down to Benin River as usual. You're to run a mahogany concession, not a detective bureau. *Savez?*"

Cartwright thought he did. Obviously, Benton's death and the manner of it were to be no concern of his. The firm of Marsden & Company and, no doubt, the Southern Nigerian police, had their own methods of finding explanations for supposedly unexplainable things, and they evidently preferred that Benton's successor would take over Benton's job just as if nothing unusual had happened.

This suited Cartwright, particularly at the moment, when each step he took made him think hopefully of a deck chair with a leg rest, and a long, amber filled glass at his elbow and . . .

"Li'l bit time pass," the genial Coffee assured him for the ninth or tenth time, and grinned his perpetual grin, "we go catch Balami."

"Hunh."

Cartwright grunted his disgust with all such promises and looked slant eyed at his ambling, swaying string of carriers, wondering how they did it. A dusty looking bunch of knock kneed cripples he had thought them at Siluko; and truly enough, they were a straggling limbed crew, shuffling and wabbling along, as if the load of baggage or supplies each man carried would slip from his crinkly head any moment.

They looked lazy and perpetually tired, and they *were* lazy and perpetually tired, but, of their own volition, they walked two days on end carrying a fifty pound weight on their heads just to earn the price of a little rice, a bit of cloth perhaps and a few drinks of squareface gin. Cartwright had no respect at all for their judgment in the selection of a job.

And that the seething life of the jungle chattered and screeched and squawked all about him in a thousand tongues; that it crawled or crept or flew in endless conflict with the urging of necessity; that the dragon fly that darted sharply hither and yon, the leopard that skulked in waiting for nightfall and the scraggly, unclothed natives who lurked like frightened fantoms in their grubby mud and thatch villages were all governed alike by the same immutable laws—Cartwright was not interested.

He wanted to reach Balami before sundown and take a load off his feet; and monkeys, whether they had tails and lived in a tree or wore something like a dishrag for a loin cloth and lived under thatch, did not make him forget for a minute that he had not done this much walking since—well, he had never done this much walking before. A fifteen mile cross-country run with the old Greystone Harriers had been about his most ambitious effort, up to this time.

One of the carriers stumbled, lurched against a slighter carrier ahead and both came to sudden grief in the dust, spilling the contents of a loosely packed case of supplies all over the landscape.

The other carriers laughed in loud derision. Coffee shut them up with a crackling broadside of half a dozen dialects and Cartwright, borrowing a load from the nearest carrier's head, sat down.

About ten minutes later, when the damaged case had been repaired and its scattered contents gathered together again, Cartwright came once more to his feet, walked a few steps and stopped. Then he walked a few more steps and stopped again.

"Coffee."

"Yessuh."

"My feet done finis'."

"Yessuh." Coffee's genial smile understood perfectly. "Plenty white man feet done finis' foh dis road."

"Eh?" Cartwright stiffened sharply. So Coffee's perpetual smile had beamed genially upon plenty white men whose feet . . . "*Animo!* Damn you! Make quick! Edge! One time!"

COFFEE'S smile did not waver in the slightest. He knew how to handle his white masters much better than they knew how to handle him, and when he and his gang of carriers trailed into Balami shortly after dark, it did not surprise him in the least to find Cartwright just a limping step or two behind him.

Cartwright was vaguely aware of a little cluster of corrugated iron outhouses that kept a respectful distance from a bungalow that occupied the center foreground of a rather indeterminate clearing. Coffee informed him that there was a creek on the immediate left and that the native quarters were on the creek side, not so very far down the bank; but Cartwright was not listening.

Five steps—Cartwright counted them painfully—led up to the veranda of the bungalow and there was a lighted stand lamp in the living room; a lamp that shed its moth clouded light upon a canvas deck chair that had a leg rest. There was a small wicker table beside the deck chair and presently there was a long, amber filled glass and a quart bottle on the table. Cartwright occupied the deck chair, his eyes were closed and his fingers were wrapped around the amber filled glass.

A houseboy of the Jakri breed was bathing Cartwright's feet and anointing them with oil. The odor of palm oil chop, fried chicken and baked yams wafted through open windows and doors, and in a little while Cartwright would bathe, shave, don spotless white raiment and dine like a Czar.

Perhaps there were five hundred blacks at his command; perhaps fifteen hundred. The number, he had been told, varied according to necessity. But there were always enough; and there, alone in the black jungle of Benin, his white face made him a king among—

Cartwright opened his eyes sharply; opened them, closed them and opened them again.

"I am Saldor."

Cartwright blinked. He knew, the last time he had weighed himself, that he had tipped the scales at one hundred and seventy-eight pounds, and he was built to match. In fact, Cartwright had always been rather proud of his physical perfections.

But Saldor . . .

It was not that Saldor was so tall or so heavy. He weighed possibly ten pounds more than Cartwright and he had a scant inch the better of Cartwright in height. So it was not just a matter of pounds and inches. It was a kind of sublime and shiny magnificence—a majesty that had been chiseled out of polished ebony.

Even in that first instant Cartwright knew who was king in Balami.

Saldor was dressed in tight fitting white duck, carried a broad brimmed panama in his hand and wore buckskin shoes with rubber soles. Part Lagos-man, part Hausa, the agent at Siluko had said he was; and possibly had forgotten to add part panther. Cartwright had once seen a black panther in a cage on board the gin tank *Nonda* in Segwanga Creek and he remembered the rippling muscles, the ever present suggestion of speed and power, the look in the beast's eyes . . .

"I am Saldor," the overseer repeated and his voice, low as it was pitched, held a vibrant basso note that thundered down the scale into mysterious, subterranean caverns of sound.

"Oh, yes—yes, of course, Saldor. Nelson told me about you. Sit down. My name's Cartwright."

Saldor bowed gravely.

"I am pleased to meet Mr. Cartwright," he said, studying his every word; and then sat down in a creaking Madeira chair that was so placed as to give him the effect of shining in the shadows. "You have heard of me before?"

"Oh, yes. From Nelson at Siluko."

"I mean—before that time?"

"Well—you see—have a cigaret? Something to drink perhaps?"

Saldor bowed again but waved the invitation aside with a sweep of his panama. It was an impatient and an imperious gesture; a gesture that relegated Cart-

wright, his cigarets and his liquor to the imperial ash heap. Obviously Saldor resented the fact that Cartwright had not heard of him until he had reached Siluko, and it was just as obvious that he took his kingship in Balami even more seriously than Nelson had indicated. Apparently, too, he expected every one to know it, and to be prepared to look up with proper respect to the throne.

Cartwright thought that this properly applied to new white supervisors more specifically than to any one else because, of course, the white supervisor in Balami was the authorized "king," and his arrival immediately reduced Saldor to a mere prime ministership or dukedom—a reduction in rank which Saldor plainly refused to accept, even though he did make a pretense of acknowledging the authority of the powers that spoke from Liverpool by way of Siluko.

Cartwright was afraid he was not going to like Saldor or his kingship or anything about him. Not that he cared a damn how much of a king Saldor thought he was, but if it made him think he could refuse good liquor as if it were bilge water—the shiny swine! The next time he was offered good Scotch—

"You have not been on the concessions before?"

"No. This is my first experience of the—" then Cartwright became suddenly aware of his exposed and tender feet and wondered what sort of parlor supervisor Saldor must think he was to have a flunky massaging his feet like this— "Er—I always do this when I come in from tramping through the bush. Try it some time. It feels fine. Like a tonic."

Saldor nodded.

"We have three other overseers beside myself," he told Cartwright blandly. "But I am the chief overseer. Whenever you are ready to be shown around the concession, let me know."

"Surely. In a few days. When I get the hang of things around here." Then to the houseboy, "All right, Bekka. Make finis' and get bath water."

"Yessuh."

THE BOY "made finis'," slipped a pair of upper Niger sandals on Cartwright's feet and left the room. Cartwright took a long sip of his whisky and soda, leaned back in his chair, sighed in deep content and glanced toward Saldor.

"Fine. You'll be ready to show me around in a day or two?"

"Whenever you are ready," Saldor said gravely as if he had had something more imminently serious on his mind. Then, after a short pause, he asked—

"You know the police are here?"

"The police? White officers?"

Saldor shook his head.

"Special colored agents. They join our gangs and send information to Benin City. Some of them I do not know myself. It is bad for the work, this police matter—" a pause— "You were Mr. Benton's friend?"

"No. I didn't know him. Never heard of him until I was ordered up here to take his place."

Saldor nodded slowly.

"Mr. Benton was very kind to me. I was very sorry when he died—like that."

"Like what?"

Saldor's head was held a little on one side. He looked at Cartwright in a kind of sorrowful tolerance that somehow made him more majestic than ever.

"You do not know how Mr. Benton died?" he asked slowly.

"No. I know there was some mystery, but no one would tell me anything about it—that is, no one who really knows."

"There *is* no one who really knows," Saldor interrupted slowly. "Mr. Benton disappeared from his bed."

"His bed?"

"In there," Saldor said, and pointed impressively to an adjoining room; the room that was to be Cartwright's bedroom.

"In there?" Cartwright repeated in a very low voice.

"In there. From his bed. He was alive and well the night before it happened. A little drunk, perhaps, and sorry for his life. Every man who is alone is likely to

be sorry about his life sometimes. But Mr. Benton was not sick. No. Just a little too much whisky. I was with him when he went to bed. In fact, I persuaded him to go to bed. I put him to bed. And when I left him he was asleep."

"Asleep?"

"Sound asleep."

"And—and then what?"

"In the morning he was not there."

"Not there?"

"No. Not there."

"You—you mean he'd gone out—wandered into the bush and—"

"He did not wander."

"What do you mean?" Cartwright was sitting bolt upright now, his feet on the floor and he leaned across the little wicker table. "What happened to him? Why in hell are you telling me this? Why all this ruddy mystery?"

Saldor scarcely moved. His shiny ebony face glistened in the shadows and his white duck suit shone with a starchy gleam in contrast.

"I did not make the mystery," he said blandly. "I put Mr. Benton to bed. I saw him asleep. And I saw him no more until—"

Saldor paused. There was no reason why he should pause except for effect and Cartwright was instantly conscious of being suavely and maliciously held in suspense.

"Until what?" Cartwright demanded with an unbidden rasp in his voice. "Why don't you finish it?"

Saldor rose slowly shaking his head in profound compassion.

"When the watch boys found Mr. Benton he was lying upon his face. Near the creek side. In his pajamas. Without shoes. Dead."

"Dead!" Cartwright looked up at the towering magnificence of Saldor with staring eyes. "Dead. What—how was he killed?"

Saldor backed slowly toward the door.

"That is the mystery." A moment's pause. "When you need me I will come at once. Good night, Mr. Cartwright."

"Just a minute."

Saldor halted in the doorway.

"Yes?"

"You know how he was killed, don't you, even if you don't know who did it?"

"We know nothing."

"Nothing? Weren't there any marks—cuts, bullet holes—"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

Saldor nodded gravely.

"It is very mysterious. Nothing but his little dog whining beside the body. That was all."

"His little dog? What kind of dog? Where is it?"

"A terrier. A fox terrier. The white police commissioner, Mr. Garnet, took it to Benin City with him. But I understand it has died—of a broken heart. A very nice little dog. It is a great pity."

"Hunh." Cartwright looked slowly up at Saldor. "The dog died, too, eh? I wonder why?"

"Of a broken heart," Saldor repeated. "So I am told."

"I see—" dryly. "Maybe Benton died of a broken heart, too?"

"I do not think so," Saldor contended smoothly. "The doctor from Benin City—he says it was not the heart nor the ap—ap—"

"Apoplexy?"

Saldor bowed.

"That is the word. It is too difficult for me when I try to remember."

Cartwright's sour expression soured a little more.

"All right—" gruffly. "I'll send for you when I need you. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Cartwright."

And the glistening majesty of Saldor slipped noiselessly out, leaving Cartwright with a decidedly chilly feeling racing up and down his spine.

HE DID not trust the man in spite of Nelson's assurances and he sensed a malicious deliberation in Saldor's method of telling the story of Benton's death. Also he resented the fact that Nelson of Siluko had so carefully withheld so much of the

details and had actually advised him not to go nosing around looking for information on the subject—because it would make the gangs restless!

The gangs! What the devil did he care about the gangs? What about himself? Why hadn't he been given some idea of what he was running into? And why had Saldor, who had a very keen sense of his own magnificence and importance, so deliberately made a business of bringing up the affair from its grisliest angle? This before he, Cartwright, had even had time to finish his first drink in his new quarters.

Cartwright's expression showed that, just then, he was more angry than afraid. He felt that he had been tricked and that Saldor knew a great deal more about the truth of the affair than he was telling. And the subsequent death of Benton's fox terrior . . .

Cartwright scowled upon his new world, yelled sharply for the bath water he had ordered, finished his first drink and poured himself another whisky. Straight, this time.

He gulped this down and began scuffing nervously about the room in his sandals, puffing on a cigaret, glowering every now and then into the blackness of the clearing beyond the light of the standlamp and carefully, without admitting it to himself, keeping away from the room from which Benton had disappeared.

At night—in his sleep—to be found by the watch boys lying face down . . .

At night. In his sleep. Alone.

That's when it happened. And any night when *he* was asleep and alone like that—any night, in his sleep, before he could come awake . . .

"Hell!" Cartwright shook himself. Where was that bath water? Why the devil didn't Bekka hurry? Those ruddy Jakri houseboys never were any good—lazy, sloppy swine, stealing everything in sight—

"Eh? Oh, hello, Coffee. What do you want?"

The headman stood in the doorway with a hippo hide thong wound about his right hand.

"Saldor boy catch thief foh storehouse, suh."

"Thief? Storehouse. What of it?"

"Saldor no like flog palaver, suh. Be so I ask you what I go do. All time thief palaver be flog palaver."

So Saldor did not like the idea of tying a thief up to a hardwood post and larruping his back with a hippo hide. Coffee, apparently, did not seem to mind either the idea or the job. Cartwright paused.

"Bring thief foh dis place," he said sharply.

"Yessuh."

Coffee went out just as Bekka came in.

"Baf' water ready, suh."

"All right. What's matter you no light lamp foh dat room?" Cartwright indicated the bedroom.

"Yessuh. One time, suh," Bekka said hurriedly and, picking up a box of safety matches from the little wicker table, entered the bedroom without any hesitation and lighted the lamp.

Of course, Cartwright did not purposely wait till the lamp was lighted before he entered the bedroom. It wasn't that. He stayed in the living room just because he wanted to pour himself another little drink and—what was the matter with him, anyway? If he were going to let this thing get to him the first night, in the very first hour . . .

From the bedroom doorway he saw that the room was ordinary enough. A Madeira chair, an old fashioned box-like chest of drawers, a wash basin with a mirror over it and—the bed. Just the usual kind of bed with a mosquito curtain. A mosquito curtain, however, that looked unusually clean. Most unusually clean. As if it might be new. As if it might very recently have replaced the old curtain—the old curtain—

"Get baf' towel," Cartwright snapped at Bekka.

"Yessuh."

And presently, with a very large bath towel wrapped about him native fashion, he was following Bekka out to his bath; a wooden tub which awaited him on a screened back porch that was made

more or less private by the lowering of blinds made of native mats.

Bekka retired, but returned when Cartwright was trying to think of "new mosquito curtains for old" and dry himself at the same time.

"What's that?" Cartwright barked at the houseboy. "Coffee bring thief? All right. Bring him in."

"Foh dis place?"

"What's wrong with this place? Bring him in and bring dry towel."

"Yessuh."

Bekka had the discretion to bring in the towel first. This he wrapped around Cartwright, then allowed Coffee and the thief to come in while he tried to see to it that his master's feet were properly dried. But Cartwright, seated on a camp chair, pushed him out of the way to get a closer look at the thief—a bushy, shiny eyed creature in a loin cloth, apparently not very much awed or afraid.

"What is he? Beni? Ijo?"

"He be so-so Kukuruku," Coffee answered with all the contempt of a Benin River Jakri for any other breed.

"What he steal?"

"He no catch nothing, suh. Saldor boy done catch him foh storehouse, suh, dat's all."

"Hunh. Didn't have time to get away with anything, eh?" Cartwright studied the Kukuruku with a slightly alcoholic eye. "What you name?"

"Jara, suh."

"Jara?"

"Yessuh."

Cartwright paused.

"All right, Jara. You go 'membah me long time. *Savez?* Long time you go 'membah Cartwright."

"Ye—yessuh," Jara conceded doubtfully.

"All right." Then to Coffee sharply, indicating the hippo hide, "Throw that damned thing away. I can use my boot when I have to. Make him work one day without pay. *Savez?*"

"Yessuh," Coffee answered and looked rather disgusted with life in general, and overseers and white men in particular.

"Give him one day chop. One time."

"Yessuh."

"All right. Court's closed. Get the hell out of here! Edge! Vamoose!"

"Yessuh."

THE "COURT" cleared with precipitate dispatch and presently Cartwright was back in the bedroom alone, dressing for dinner and trying to keep his attention away from the mosquito curtain that looked so new.

He had had Bekka lay out his white tropical dinner clothes, with the maroon cummerbund that he knew was so effective; not because he thought all this was necessary to preserve his self-respect in Balami or elsewhere, but simply because he liked to think he did not need regulations and environment to remind him that his name was Cartwright. And a Cartwright, of course, dressed for dinner just as naturally in the middle of nowhere as in the social heart of London, Paris or New York.

Benton, very possibly, had had other ideas. He had probably become careless, indifferent, and had allowed his loneliness to get to him in the usual way. Too much liquor and self-pity—too much temper and temperament—too many floggings, perhaps, incurring too many antagonisms; and finally—at night—in his bed asleep—before he had had a chance to cry out or make a sound of any sort . . .

Cartwright jerked his attention away from the gauze-white mosquito curtain that hung about the bed and strode out into the living room to dine in solitary state and thereafter to try to think of everything but the ultimate necessity of going to bed.

Somehow, when dinner was over, he found he was not so tired as he supposed he would be. Even his feet seemed to have forgotten to ache and he had always made it a rule never to go to bed until he was tired enough to drop off to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

This seemed to be an excellent rule to follow in a place like Balami.

He supposed his sleeplessness was due to the strangeness of his new quarters; to the fact that he was probably too tired to sleep; to the sudden and unusual loneliness that came down upon him like a pall as he sat in the deck chair beside the little wicker table, and looked out of the open windows into the blackness of the jungle bound clearing, while he drank out of tall, amber filled glasses till his eyes became bleared and blurred and he began to hear noises—sniffing and scraping and scratching; odd noises that stopped and started again; stopped and started, sometimes ending in a low whine that, if Cartwright's sympathies had been more coherent, would have registered a decided note of appeal.

He was not sure where this sound came from but it seemed to come from somewhere outside the screened back porch where he had had his bath and had saved the bushy Jara from a flogging. He imagined it was a bush dog in a marauding mood, or perhaps it was just one of the watch boys fooling around with something or other; but, in any event, Cartwright thought a competitive noise would drown it out or drive it away.

So, presently, Cartwright began to sing. In Warri, where he had had a white audience, he had not dared to sing; but in Balami, where he was a king and where no one was privileged to throw things at him. . . .

In the middle of the first chorus, just when he was beginning to make himself heard in real earnest, he had the momentary impression that there were two Saldors standing outside the screen door. And it seemed to Cartwright, even in his befuddled state, that every time he had a thought on the subject of kingship, Saldor was sure to show up and dispute his right to the throne.

However, the sniffing, scraping sound had stopped or gone off elsewhere. Cartwright, of course, stopped singing, too. Saldor pushed open the screen door with a large gesture and stepped inside.

"Well," Cartwright demanded at once in a tone that was more belligerent than he realized, "what's on your mind?"

"I was just taking a last look around to see if the watch boys—"

"Isn't that Coffee's job? He's the headman around here, isn't he?"

"Only in part," Saldor informed Cartwright in his precise and careful way, always giving the impression that he was handling the English language with gloves. "And I heard you singing."

"Don't you like my singing?"

Saldor actually smiled as if he meant it, but there was—or seemed to be—a beady glint in his eyes that Cartwright did not like.

"It is not that," Saldor said smoothly. "But when you have walked in the bush so much—" his smile widened— "it is better to go to bed earlier."

Cartwright looked at the chief overseer with an incredulous stare.

"Are you sending me to bed!"

Saldor shook his head solemnly.

"That is not my place. But I know this work. I know this life up here in Balami. For a white man it is lonely. Too lonely. And when he think and think and try to find company in a bottle—"

"Damn your impertinence!" Cartwright came to his feet sharply, flourishing a half-empty glass. "Do you think you can talk to me like that? As if you were a ruddy missionary! Get out and stay out till I send for you!"

Saldor did not move; scarcely indicated that he heard, and Cartwright on his feet did not seem to disturb him in the least. If anything, the beady, staring glint in his eyes seemed to become more pronounced —steadier and more penetrating, as if he were looking straight through Cartwright's head.

"Mr. Benton was like that—at first," he said, in those low, unhurried basso tones of his. "He would not listen to me. He would not go to bed. He would sit there in that deck chair, thinking—thinking—"

"Get out!"

"And lose his temper with me or the watch boys. Or anybody. And often there would be a flogging. Several of

them sometimes. For any reason or for no reason at all. Just if Mr. Benton were in the humor for it, I think he liked to see a hippo hide thong make the blood come—"

"Shut up! Damn you, Saldor—"

"From a black man's back."

"Get out!" Cartwright's voice almost screeched. He had put down the glass and he was facing Saldor with his hands free, his quinine ridden nerves jangling in raucous discord as he tried to avoid Saldor's eyes and convince himself that if ever he were going to assert himself in Balami, the time was now. "If you compel me to use my boot, Saldor—"

"Mr. Benton did not like the black man. Not in Balami," Saldor went placidly on, his voice a little thicker but unhurried. "He thought the black man was a thief. A liar. And very lazy and very stupid. And he thought that if the black man were not so lazy or so stupid or so much of a thief, there would be no need for a white man being stationed in Balami."

SALDOR'S mouth smiled tolerently, but there was no smile in the eyes which seemed to expect Cartwright to say or do something. But Cartwright said nothing, did nothing, He waited now for Saldor to finish, because he knew Saldor had not finished and he wanted to know just why the overseer was staring at him so intently and just what the overseer had it in mind to do.

"So Mr. Benton blamed the black man's stupidity for his own foolishness. He drank and thought and would not go to bed. Not until I put him to bed—"

"If you put a finger on me, Saldor, I'll boot you off the concession!"

Saldor had not stirred a foot, and it was the uncanny steadiness of his gaze, more than anything he had said, that bothered Cartwright's whisky bleared senses most. There was something in Saldor's look—something queerly penetrating yet soothing—something like a sedative that had made Cartwright listen in spite of himself . . .

Cartwright jerked his attention away from Saldor's shiny face with an effort that seemed to have the effect of jarring him from head to foot. He reached for his half-filled glass of Scotch-and-soda and his fingers shook as he took hold of it. They had suddenly lost their power to grip anything with any sureness and, even half turned away from Saldor, the effect of the overseer's eyes, gleaming like sharp points of light out of the shiny, ebony majesty of the man . . .

Cartwright pulled himself together with a snap, squared his shoulders and, with a convulsive effort, compelled his fingers to take something like a strangle hold upon the glass.

That was better. Much better. So long as he could take hold of things like that, he was all right.

"No more whisky tonight," the low, thick basso voice told him—at a distance that did not appear to be a foot away. "Not tonight."

"Damn you! Get out! *Get out!*"

The contents of the glass aimed for Saldor's eyes, missed their objective entirely and splashed aimlessly past the majestic black's ear. In a trice, a huge arm had encircled Cartwright's waist, a giant hand had closed about his wrist and, for a moment or two, Cartwright thought his ribs and his right arm were going to crack. The glass fell with a splintering crash to the floor.

Saldor shook his head slowly and compassionately; a compassion that ridiculed Cartwright's height and poundage as if he had been a lightweight.

"That is not good," he said, and his breathing was not disturbed in the slightest. "I am Saldor—your friend. Every white man's friend. And in Balami the friendship of Saldor is necessary."

His tolerant smile made Cartwright writhe; but the appalling power in his arms made Cartwright pause as he watched the overseer's self-assurance mount higher and higher in spite of his pretense at friendship.

"No more whisky tonight," Saldor said, and his voice had become noticeably thicker with exultation or excitement, or both. "Your feet are too soft. Your head is too light. And in Balami, whisky is bad for trouble like that."

He grinned broadly now and the queer, penetrating glint in his eyes had gone, just as if he had no further use for it since he knew Cartwright was no match for him.

"Sleep is what you need, Mr. Cartwright. Sleep. Tomorrow we will talk again. About the concession and the work here. Tomorrow. But tonight—Now, Mr. Cartwright, you had better go to bed."

Cartwright did not struggle. Neither did he waste breath in futile words. He waited, gathering his senses and his strength, trying in a gasping, befuddled way, to keep his head.

There was something fishy behind all this—something sinister; something that, somehow or other, had to do with Benton and the mystery of Benton's death. And Cartwright was not so much under the influence of liquor that Saldor's insistence upon sending him to bed did not have its own very dubious significance for him.

Saldor had put Benton to bed. He had stayed with Benton until he had fallen asleep. Then, later, lying face down near the creek side, without a mark upon the body, Benton had been found . . .

"I'm sorry," Cartwright mumbled thickly and tried to look as drunkenly apologetic as possible. "I've had too much liquor and I'm tired. Bed's the best place for me; you're right about that."

Saldor nodded approvingly.

"Too much liquor is never good. For white man or black. Especially in Balami." His arm released Cartwright's waist from its constrictor-like pressure and his fingers relaxed their grip on Cartwright's wrist. "Better mind where you step, suh," he advised in sudden deference, indicating the broken glass on the floor as he moved away a pace or two.

Cartwright retreated carefully behind the deck chair.

"Call Bekka, will you?" he asked rather than ordered. "He can sweep it up."

Saldor hesitated, then nodded.

"I'll send him in," he said and moved toward the back door of the bungalow. "You won't need me again tonight, suh?"

Cartwright did not like that "suh" at all. It was too sudden and too deferential and did not fit Saldor in the least.

"No—er—no. I don't think so. Good night, Saldor. Thanks for—er—bringing me to my senses."

Saldor smiled.

"I am your friend," he said, as if this covered everything. "Good night, Mr. Cartwright."

His broad back disappeared by way of the rear door and Cartwright suddenly became aware of the fact that he was chilly and shivering and that there were large beads of cold perspiration on his forehead.

YET, even then, still conscious of the power of Saldor's arms, Cartwright knew he was not afraid of his chief overseer in a physical sense. He knew, or felt, that he did not have to be; not because Saldor was in any sense a false alarm, but because the majestic black was much too subtle to descend to anything so crude as a really violent physical attack against a white man to gain whatever ends he may have had in mind.

"Saldor is Balami and Balami is Saldor's," Nelson had said; and Saldor was too consciously proud of his self-created kingship to put his throne in jeopardy by quarreling with his "treasury department." But there wasn't any doubt about his intention to establish the kind of authority to which he seemed to have become accustomed. Evidently, too, he believed in making this clear to each new white supervisor without any delay whatever.

If his panama had been a jewel encrusted crown and his white duck suit had become ermine robes of state, he could not have indicated more plainly how seriously he expected his regal status to be accepted by Cartwright, or by any one who happened

to stand in the shoes of Balami's white supervisor.

This, in itself, would have irritated Cartwright even if Saldor had not ordered him to stop drinking and go to bed. He had expected Saldor to be interesting and possibly amusing, but he had not expected him to make a ruddy nuisance of himself with his ideas on the subject of the prerogatives of a king.

"Hell of a king he is," Cartwright muttered, with his eyes on the bedroom door. "He's a missionary nursemaid, damn him!"

Cartwright thought this over sourly, and by a subconscious process of elimination realized that the element in the whole business that bothered him most was the element of mystery that seemed to weave itself into Saldor's insistence upon sending him to bed, just as he seemed to have sent Benton to bed. He had, in fact, *put* Benton to bed, and had seen Benton fall asleep.

And Benton had not been knifed or shot or fed ground glass in a dish of palm oil chop or ground nut soup. None of the usual things. He had gone to bed and to sleep in comparatively good health, and some time in the night he had been dragged out to the creek side.

Bekka, the houseboy, came in, swept up the broken glass and went out again without a word. Cartwright watched the boy abstractedly, paused awhile after he had gone, then pulled himself together, walked slowly to the bedroom door, stopped and looked in.

At once, in spite of himself, his attention focused upon the bed and upon the mosquito curtain that looked so white and new; and for a longer time than he realized he stood staring at it, wondering if the mosquito curtain really were new, or if it were just his imagination that made him see the old curtain being torn from its frame when Benton had been dragged from the bed.

Cartwright's handkerchief dabbed absently at his forehead and he listened to a passing watch boy humming a monotonous, dirge-like refrain, until the sound died out beyond the black shadows of a storehouse.

Then Cartwright became suddenly and rather unaccountably aware of silence. Not just the silence of a black African night, because the voices of the jungle shrilled and grunted and croaked just as monotonously as usual; so monotonously that Cartwright's ears paid little or no attention to them.

The silence was not outside the bungalow. It was inside. A queer sort of silence—a silence that was too prolonged, too quiet, lifeless. That was it. Lifeless. Like the silence in a morgue or a mausoleum.

Cartwright's eyes came sharply away from the bed. He did not like that bed and there was something wrong with the bedroom—something queerly wrong. It had no life in it. No life. That was what was the matter. No life.

His eyes roved in rather bleared suspicion; roved here and there, but principally in the direction of the standlamp and around the walls, high up, near the ceiling.

There were scarcely any moths or flies around the standlamp in *that* room, and the lamp had certainly been lighted long enough to attract a cloud of them; and high up on the walls near the ceiling—Cartwright's eyes narrowed and he stepped quickly back into the living room and looked up and about him to be quite sure.

Yes; there were the usual house lizards in the living room all right—high up on the walls near the ceiling. Three of them. Cream colored, to match the paint on the walls and, motionless and tireless as always, their sharp little pink eyes kept watch and ward, waiting for the first unwary moth that came their way.

True, there were not so many moths or flies around the living room lamp, but that there were three lizards in one room and none in the other . . . There was something decidedly odd about that. Cartwright could not remember ever having been in a room in the Niger River country in which there were not at least two.

He stepped back into the bedroom and

looked again; looked still more carefully and even stepped near to the bed so that he could look more closely up at the wall immediately behind it.

No. None there. Nothing. Not even the familiar sight of a mosquito trying to find a hole in the mosquito curtain.

CARTWRIGHT paused, his eyes roving absently in search of some sign of life around the bed, roved up and down, while he tried to make himself think that the absence of the customary house lizards in that room had no significance at all.

Suddenly his roving eyes stopped roving and popped wide in an unbelieving stare. For, on the floor, near the baseboard at the head of the bed, was a house lizard.

Obviously, too, it was not a healthy lizard. It was trying to crawl along the floor toward the door and its efforts were weak and slow, and apparently painful. Cartwright, watching it, was conscious of a sense of suffocation and the decided need of a drink.

There was a deep furrow between his eyes when he stooped and picked the little reptile up by the tail and carried it out to the back door and put it down in a patch of parched grass and weeds where, he hoped, it would find water or medicine after its own fashion.

Then, still turning the matter over in his mind, he moved to reenter the house, and was just in the act of closing the screen door when it was pushed suddenly back against the idle pressure of his fingers and a small body squeezed and wriggled quickly past his legs and pattered into the little hallway leading to the living room.

Cartwright turned his head and caught a sharp glimpse of the little animal as it disappeared into the hallway.

It was a fox terrier.

Cartwright followed and found the dog in the bedroom circling the bed in a state of great excitement, obviously looking for Benton.

Just then, it was not a very clean dog: and by the ragged appearance of its black and white coat and the half wild look in its bloodshot eyes, it had had to suffer its own share of danger and privation to reach Balami. That it had found its way back from Benin City at all was a source of amazement to Cartwright, and that it had escaped the vigilance of the watch boys and of Saldor, who evidently believed it had died of a broken heart, was still more amazing and indicative of an animal cunning that did not, on the face of it, seem altogether plausible.

Even as he watched the dog from the bedroom doorway, and made no effort to interfere with its frantic circling of the bed, Cartwright was still thinking of the sick house lizard, wondering vaguely why it was sick and why its mate had deserted the bedroom for the living room. There must have been a reason for this but, having little or no acquaintance with the habits of lizards, Cartwright was unable to come to any conclusions on the subject. He did not know how long the lizard had been sick or how long its mate had been in the living room, but he did know that a West African bedroom—or any other room, for that matter—without its quota of these living "fly catchers," was most unusual.

And when this most unusual circumstance was peculiar to a room from which a white man had gone to his death in the dead of night; a room in which the familiar fluttering sound of the gray moth's wings was so conspicuous by its absence, and in which a house lizard had become too sick to crawl, while its mate— Cartwright's eyes narrowed and the furrow between them became deeper and deeper as he watched the little fox terrier leaping at the tucked-in mosquito curtain that was draped, after the usual fashion, on a frame around the bed.

At every leap Cartwright expected to see the dog's teeth fasten in the curtain and tear a ragged hole in the flimsy gauze in an effort to climb into the bed. But evidently its training had been better than this because, although it leaped closely enough to the bed for its nose

almost to touch the curtain, it did not disturb the smoothly and tightly draped perfection of the curtain in the least.

That it had gone directly to the bedroom the moment it had entered the bungalow might indicate that Benton had been in the habit of lying in bed in the evenings with the lamps lighted, or it might simply mean that, after Benton's body had been found near the creek side, it had been brought into the bungalow and laid on the bed; and this had been the little fox terrier's last memory of its late master.

As yet, except to turn its head and whine occasionally, the dog had paid no attention to Cartwright. Its eagerness to find Benton was too frantic for it to give heed to anything or any one else. But presently, its low whine of appeal growing louder, it ran toward Cartwright, stopped a moment or two looking up at him, then pattered back toward the bed again, obviously expecting him to follow.

Cartwright did not follow at once. He did not like to have to show the dog that Benton was not there, and he had a certain very definite hesitation about having anything to do with that bed, under any circumstances. Then, realizing that his trepidation was foolish and possibly altogether groundless, he moved to open the mosquito curtain to satisfy the dog's whining appeals for help in the matter.

Pulling the ends of the curtain out from under the mattress, and throwing back the flaps, he stood aside to watch the dog leap upon the bed and frantically nose almost every inch of it, particularly in the vicinity of the pillows; and he saw nothing at all that gave him the slightest inkling that there might be anything unusual about the bed itself.

It was the customary white enameled iron affair plus the slender wooden frame on which the mosquito curtain was draped. The only thing that Cartwright could find to attract more than a passing glance was the obvious newness of the curtain, and this might readily have been explained by the simple need of a new curtain at the time of Benton's death.

Then, and suddenly, as he watched the fox terrier patter up and down the length of the bed several times, Cartwright became aware of a sensation of dryness in his throat and nostrils; a dryness that was accompanied by a sense of suffocation and the need for fresh air and a drink.

CARTWRIGHT coughed a little and backed away a few steps, still watching the fox terrier sniffing at the pillows and, scarcely more than a second or two later, the dog paused sharply, wheeled in a kind of drunken stagger and fell rather than jumped from the bed.

It lurched past Cartwright as if its legs would fold up at any moment and before it reached the little rear hallway, it stumbled as though it would pitch forward on its nose, but managed to steady itself and go staggering on again.

Cartwright followed, his eyes wide with a new astonishment, and when the dog led him to the back door and swayed before it, weakly whining and scratching its appeal to get out, Cartwright opened the door and trailed the little animal around the house and along a path bordered by scraggly palms—directly to the creek side.

A ragged mangrove stick breakwater flanked a tiny gig wharf that hung its deal planks over the black and swiftly flowing water; and before Cartwright realized what the dog's full intention was, it had reeled out to the edge of the wharf, toppled into the water and, in a moment, was gone.

Cartwright did not gather the full import of the little incident for several minutes. He stared down upon the sullen and silent face of Balami Creek and peered along the mangrove stick breakwater, expecting the fox terrier to clamber out again at any moment. He tried to whistle for the dog but found that his throat was too dry—dry and burning and emphatically suggesting to him the immediate need for water or a drink of some sort. Also, he felt just a little dizzy and as if the life had gone out of his knees.

He mopped his forehead absently and

tried to think. His forehead was quite dry—rather hot and prickly in fact—and he was not in very good shape to think in a straight line on any subject. But he knew if he had a drink, he could make some sense out of the jumble of disconnected thoughts that surged inside his head; thoughts about Benton's little dog and Benton and a sick lizard, and his own dry throat and shaking knees—all of which seemed to be connected in some way with the bedroom and the bed.

The bed? Hunh. Something wrong with that bed. Something badly wrong. Benton had gone to sleep in it—and then had been found in his pajamas and bare feet, lying face down near the creek side.

Near the creek side? Water? Wonder what that meant? Benton's dog, after jumping around on the bed had suddenly been taken sick and had headed immediately and directly for the creek side. And water? And the sick lizard certainly looked as if it had needed a drink.

Cartwright, staring down at the swiftly running water, felt that if he were just a little more drunk or sick or whatever it was that was the matter with him, he would be likely to think that diving into the creek would be a good idea. Even with his clothes on.

And that, of course, was silly. Plain damned foolishness. He had never been that drunk or that sick before and—

He lurched a step or two nearer the edge of the wharf, swayed a moment or two, drawing his arm wearily across his eyes.

"Hell!" he muttered to himself. "You'd better get out of here or you'll be following the dog."

He spun about, staggered a few steps, then slid down to his knees just as the lean black shadow of a bushy looking native slipped out of the dark and came to his side.

"Mas' Ca'twrigh'."

"Eh?" Cartwright heard the whispering voice, shook his head to clear it and looked up. "What's the matter with me?" he grunted thickly. "Am I drunk and seeing things?"

"Be me. Jara. You fit to walk li'l bit, suh?"

"Jara?"

"Yessuh. Jara. Mas' Benton dog done die, suh. I sorry foh dat. You fit to walk li'l bit, suh?"

"Jara—eh? Jara. Hunh. Bring me a drink. *Savez?* Bring me a drink and I'll be all right, one time."

"No, suh, Mas' Ca'twrigh', suh. You no fit to drink. Drink be bad med'cine foh dis sick palaver. Sof'ly, sof'ly—you go be all right foh your head, li'l bit. Sof'ly, sof'ly, *savez?*"

Cartwright's head swam. But he knew what he wanted. He wanted a drink in the worst way. A drink would straighten everything out and make everything clear. Jara? Jara was—who was Jara anyway? And why couldn't he have a drink?"

"Bekka," he whispered thickly through a burning film in his throat. "Where's Bekka?"

"Bekka done sleep, suh."

"Sleep?"

"Yessuh. All man done sleep, suh. Maybe so Saldor done wake, suh. I no *savez.*"

"Saldor?"

"Yessuh." Jara's voice was just a breathing whisper and he was looking sharply all about him as if he expected Saldor to loom into sight at any moment. "Maybe so Saldor make *ju-ju,* suh. He *savez ju-ju* med'cine too much."

"Hunh. *Ju-ju,* eh?" Cartwright's head cleared a little and for a brief second or two, the majesty of Saldor stood in full view of his mind's eye—a gleaming sculpture in shining ebony and white. Then the vision faded in a blurring fog that, he was quite sure, would clear away only when he had a drink. "Bring me a drink. A drink—*savez?*"

"Ye—yessuh," Jara said, realizing that Cartwright could not be reasoned out of the clamoring for a drink. "I go catch drink one time."

He stood for a moment, however, looking steadily at Cartwright as if he were afraid he would vanish if left alone.

HE LEFT Cartwright's side, moved away a few steps and waited tensely, his sharp little eyes peering into the dark in every direction.

There was, however, no sign of Saldor. At the far end of the little path leading down to the wharf, a watch boy stood for a minute or so idly swinging a hurricane lantern, then drifted from sight behind a wine palm.

Cartwright raised his head and saw the shadow-like figure of Jara standing so near.

"What's matter? You no fit to catch drink?" He struggled to reach his feet and Jara jumped to help him. "I go catch drink foh myself. *Savez?* Bushman like you no *savez* houseboy palaver."

"Yessuh," Jara agreed readily, and lent all his support to keep Cartwright on his feet. "You besser li'l bit, suh."

"Li'l bit. When I catch drink—" Cartwright swayed, paused, lurched a step or two as though he would fall, then straightened suddenly and rather comically, like a guardsman on parade. "All right—" thickly—"we go."

Very resolutely, Cartwright started to walk, managed a few steps, sagged at the knees and almost went down again. But, with Jara's help, he remained upright and essayed a few more steps nearer to the drink he was sure would make everything all right.

Possibly no man ever struggled harder to achieve complete disaster. Of course, Cartwright did not know he was fighting so hard to reach the one thing that would do him the greatest hurt; and what Jara had had to say on the subject of liquor being "bad medicine" for this specific "sick palaver" was completely forgotten.

Cartwright wanted a drink; the longest drink he had ever had and, with all the determination he could muster, on the verge of sinking into blessed oblivion at every step, he made the seemingly interminable journey from the wharf to the bungalow veranda with an exhibition of courage that made the whites of Jara's eyes gleam like lights in the dark.

On the veranda Cartwright wrapped an arm around one of the veranda posts, pushed Jara away from him and said:

"I go catch drink for myself one time. Open that door."

Jara hesitated. That he was not altogether what he seemed to be would possibly have occurred to Cartwright if Cartwright had been in any condition to think about it. But, in any event, Jara's authority was slim, Cartwright was a white man and Jara had never learned the art of putting white men to sleep even when the procedure was advisable.

He looked quickly and sharply about him, his eyes full of a suspicious alertness that anticipated almost anything, then he touched Cartwright's arm with his fingertips and whispered:

"Drink palaver no good. Be besser you lef' um."

Cartwright snorted his disgust with advice of the sort and flung the black boy's fingers from his arm.

"Bushman!" he grunted thickly. "You no *savez* white man drink. White man drink be good for all sick palaver."

He unwrapped his arm from the veranda post and stepped away from all such demeaning support. Jara moved toward him in an effort to be helpful, but Cartwright waved him aside with a drunken gesture and lurched toward the door, weaving on his numbed legs as if he would surely go down any minute.

He slumped against the door fumbling for the knob, his breath coming in painful, wheezing gasps, his eyes and throat burning as if filled with red hot sparks, the smother of the African night whirling about him in pinwheels of cerise and black.

Mechanically his fingers closed about the doorknob and mechanically turned it, and the door, swinging inward suddenly because the dead weight of his one hundred and seventy-eight pounds was thrown against it, slipped out of his fingers and slammed against the inner wall.

Cartwright plunged forward and fell heavily upon his face, his clawing hands, even then, groping futilely in the direction

of the bottle of Scotch on the little wicker table.

Jara moved quickly to help him, took a few short steps into the room and stopped. His eyes popped wide with amazement and fear and, for a second or two, he seemed frozen to the spot; but only for a second or two. In the third second he had leaped backward, whirled and was gone.

Saldor, standing beside the little wicker table, smiled.

It was a kingly smile; restrained, in spite of his sublime self-assurance, and compassionate as always, though the panther-like hate in his eyes was ready to leap into life in a moment. Machiavelli, who established proper rules of conduct for princes who hoped to keep their kingdoms, would have appreciated Saldor's smile under the circumstances, just as Saldor, who was a not too humble student of the great Florentine, had learned to appreciate Machiavelli.

Saldor hoped, in fact, that he was being a credit to the author of "The Prince." He was doing his best; the best he could within his kingdom; and perhaps if a second white overseer came to a sudden and mysterious end, the fools who sent him there would realize that it was best to leave Saldor of Balami to rule his kingdom alone.

CARTWRIGHT lay where he had fallen and his clawing fingers had stopped groping toward the bottle of Scotch. The pinwheels of cerise and black no longer spun before his eyes and the burning sparks in his throat had gone out into a darkness that was utterly devoid of any kind of light.

Saldor stood looking down upon the fallen white man. It was difficult to determine from his expression what was in his mind and when he reached for the bottle of Scotch and a glass, he did so absently, as if he were not certain whether he should pour the drink or not.

His glance shifted to the door and obviously he was thinking of Jara who had so very plainly indicated his fear of him. Then he looked down at Cartwright again, picked up the bottle of Scotch and poured three fingers of whisky into the glass. Half of a flat bottle of soda water followed and Saldor moved toward Cartwright a step, then stopped.

There was indecision in his eyes and something that was akin to fear. Once more he looked toward the door and, quite evidently, the existence of Jara bothered him. Presently it bothered him so much that he stepped across Cartwright, strode to the door, glass in hand, and looked out.

There was no sign of Jara on or near the veranda; not a hint of life of any sort except the winking fireflies that pricked the dark with tiny pinpoints of light.

Saldor's glance roved slowly back and forth; then, stepping back into the room, he carefully closed the door and, with his hand on the knob, stood looking down at Cartwright whose position had not changed in the slightest.

As he looked, his smooth imperturbability gave way to an expression of hate; a hatred that was born of a kind of imperial jealousy—the jealousy of a king who would not tolerate any usurpation of the throne that he believed belonged to him.

He moved toward Cartwright slowly, soundlessly, not unlike a huge black panther that, with unwinking eyes upon its prey, was timing its spring to a hair's breadth. Everything about Saldor suggested this—everything but the glass in his hand. The glass, ironically enough, represented charity. Saldor was going to give the fallen white man a drink to revive him. On the face of things, to an eye witness, it would certainly have seemed the proper and the charitable thing to do.

Reaching Cartwright's side, Saldor knelt on one knee and, taking hold of Cartwright's shoulder, tried to turn him over on his back. But, using only one hand, Saldor found that Cartwright's dead weight was just a little too much for him, so he put down the glass at a safe distance and tried again with two.

Cartwright flopped over on his back like a leaden thing. His lips twitched and his fingers relaxed a little, but otherwise he gave every evidence of having passed completely out of the picture.

Saldor bent over him, reaching for the glass. He thrust an arm under Cartwright's head and raised him up a little, bringing the glass to the white man's closed mouth.

"Drink your way to hell!" he said in a low voice that vibrated like a cello string. "Drink, you fool, and—"

Cartwright's head rolled sidewise and some of the liquor splashed upon his cheek and trickled down his neck. He stirred a little, flung a limp arm up and around Saldor's shoulders and hung on. This movement jolted Saldor's right hand and spilled more of the whisky upon Cartwright's cheek and neck. His eyes came sharply open and, with a shuddering heave of his body, his left arm mechanically thrust Saldor's right hand up with a jerk.

In his eagerness to save as much of the liquor as possible, Saldor's right arm flung wide and Cartwright's left continued upward and circled the black's neck.

Cartwright's eyes were wide open and staring, but his senses were still numb and wavering and he hung on to Saldor's neck because it was the instinctive thing to do.

Saldor muttered to himself in Hausa and put the half empty glass down on the floor; and even as he did this he could feel Cartwright's arms take a firmer hold upon his neck—the convulsive, fear born grip of a man who was subconsciously defending himself against an unknown danger.

"Damn!"

The oath was a thick guttural of annoyance rather than of anger, and Saldor tried to release himself from the unwelcome and impeding embrace of Cartwright's arms. But Cartwright held on and Saldor, realizing the part he was supposed to play, said placatingly into Cartright's ear:

"Sof'ly, sof'ly, Mr. Cartwright. Everything is all right. Surely, suh. You're all right now. Just a little drink and—that's all. Just let me give you a little drink and you'll be all right."

Cartright heard distinctly enough. Saldor's voice? Saldor's? There had been something the matter with his throat, his legs, his head, and he had fallen—gone out cold—and now Saldor was with him inviting him to have a drink. Saldor? It was Saldor who had wanted to put him to bed. *That* bed!

Where was Jara? Jara had helped him and Jara had said—what was it Jara had said about liquor being bad medicine? Bad medicine? Jara had said something about that. Where was he? Why had he said—

"Jara!" Cartwright called hoarsely and suddenly. "Jara!"

There was no answer; nothing save the sound of Saldor's low, thick laughter as he again tried to release himself from the grip of Cartwright's arms.

"Sof'ly, sof'ly, Mr. Cartwright, suh. You're all right. Just a little drink and—"

"Damn you!"

CARTWRIGHT'S left arm took a sudden firmer grip of Saldor's neck, but his right swung free and a short and most unexpected hook snapped to Saldor's jaw. Then another. And yet another.

"You swine! You ruddy swine!"

Cartwright was not very sure of what he was saying just then, but when Saldor wrenched himself free and clear from further punishment and scrambled hurriedly to his feet, Cartwright also came staggering upward to stand upon rather uncertain legs facing Saldor, who was rubbing his jaw and trying not to make the mistake of losing his temper. His eyes, however, had a flat and dangerous look that promised an avalanche at any moment.

"Put me to bed, eh?" Cartwright said thickly, and the sparks in his throat seemed to be going out. "You'd put *me* to bed and make me go by-by?"

Saldor backed away a step and Cartwright lurched forward, feeling just a

little of his vanished strength come back into his knees.

"How'd you like it, Saldor, if I put *you* to bed? Eh? *That* bed? *Savez?*"

Saldor's eyes widened sharply, then narrowed like slits.

"*That* bed, Saldor. In *there.*"

Cartwright's staring eyes pointed more eloquently than his outstretched hand toward the bedroom.

Saldor retreated sharply, his head snapping back as though Cartwright had struck him across the face. The shiny ebony black of his cheeks took on a grayish tinge.

"How'd you like it, eh?" Cartwright demanded hoarsely, moving a step or two nearer. "Why don't you talk? What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid?"

"Scared stiff. Why? What's the matter with that bed? Eh? What's the matter with it?"

Saldor hesitated, curved a little to the right away from the bedroom, toward the front door.

"No, you don't!"

Cartwright's leap toward Saldor was a shaky thing. And Cartwright was not thinking very coherently, particularly on the subject of Saldor's size and weight. For, as Cartwright leaped, Saldor crouched suddenly, his arms spreading wide, and he gripped and flung the slighter white man head first across his shoulder.

Without giving Cartwright even a chance to catch his breath, he sprang with his burden straight toward the bedroom and the bed.

Fear, hate and desperation were mingled in Saldor's expression now, and his grip on Cartwright's legs and back was the grip of a man who had been jolted into a frenzy of action—the kind of action that was so unlike him in his more subtle moments.

He reached the bedroom door, thrust it open and plunged inside. Cartwright wriggled and squirmed and tried to free himself and regain some measure of his equilibrium, but Saldor, at a comparatively safe distance from the bed, slung Cartwright from his shoulder and, as if he were heaving a sack of flour on to a wagon, prepared to heave Cartwright on to the bed.

Suddenly—so suddenly that Cartwright felt the jar of shock—Saldor paused. Saldor went limp. He dropped Cartwright in a sagging jawed, lifeless kind of way that was neither pleasant nor complimentary.

For the bed, with its immaculate mosquito curtain, was now a bedraggled, soppy mess. And standing beside it, motionless as any mummy, was Jara, with a fair sized sprinkling can in one hand and a perfectly good automatic in the other.

An open window showed how Jara had arrived and, framed in that open window, was a white face and a black; the faces of Nelson of Siluko and Coffee, the headman.

Saldor's lower jaw hung a moment. The next he had spun toward the door.

Jara's gun spoke and Nelson's barked a vicious echo.

And the king in Balami pitched down from his throne and spread hugely upon his face.

"SORRY we had to muss up your bed," Nelson said to Cartwright some little time later. "But when you want to lay dust, you have to use water. And you can't be fussy with *masta* in the air."

"*Masta?*"

"That's what they call the stuff you inhaled into your nose and throat when Benton's dog jumped all over the bed. The *masta* was sprinkled on the mosquito curtain and the pillows and the dog stirred it up, just as you would have done if you'd gone to bed. You'd probably have rolled around a bit, and every move you made would have shaken the curtain. And the minute anybody or anything sniffs a few grains of that kind of *masta*, he immediately becomes aware of a number of unpleasant sensations which, so he thinks, only water or liquor in large quantities will cure." Nelson paused. "You felt the little you got because you'd been

drinking too much, and another drink or two might have finished you."

Cartwright's glance fell to his shoes and Nelson added wryly—

"What happened to poor Benton and Benton's dog is simple enough now, isn't it?"

Simple! Cartwright shivered a little because it was so very simple. The picture of what had happened to Benton was starkly clear, particularly since Benton had probably been more than just a little drunk on the night of his death. And Cartwright understood, without any difficulty, why Saldor had deliberately frightened him with the story of Benton's disappearance; and why Saldor had insisted that he, Cartwright, should not drink. Saldor had known that the advice would be resented and that the result would probably be the opposite of the advice. Evidently Saldor had found this trick had worked with Benton, and Saldor was nothing if he were not subtle—particularly in the matter of building an alibi for himself, while, at the same time, he was goading his victim on to destruction.

"How did you happen to show up so suddenly?" Cartwright asked after a little while. "And who is Jara?"

"I was right behind you all the way from Siluko," Nelson said simply. "And Jara, when he's in uniform, is a sergeant of police in Benin City. We had suspected Saldor, but we didn't know about the *masta* until we saw what happened to the dog. Then a great light dawned on Jara, and he sneaked in with the sprinkling can while Coffee and I tried to keep an eye on you and see to it that Saldor didn't hurt you."

"Hunh. I suppose it sounds all right to you," Cartwright said sourly. "But why send me in here without telling me—"

"Because there was nothing to tell except that we suspected Saldor—just as we suspeeted three or four others, including your house boy. I wasn't absolutely sure of Saldor until he offered you that drink, and I was sure of him then only because he was too sure of himself. Clever people usually make the mistake of taking one chance too many at the wrong time." Nelson shook his head regretfully. "He was a first class mahogany man, too. One of the very best." A pause. "I'm darned sorry about that little dog. Darned sorry."

"Eh?" Cartwright sat bolt upright. "What about me?"

Nelson grinned, rose and stretched.

"You'd hardly have known you had that little sniff of *masta* if you hadn't had too much to drink. And you never were in any real danger anyway because you were too well watched." Nelson put a fatherly arm about Cartwright's shoulders. "For all that, you were pretty shrewd for a first-timer in these parts. You did a lot of clever thinking, and when I heard you asking Saldor if he'd like to be put to bed—" Nelson laughed and moved toward a Madeira chair that, like the deck chair, also had a leg rest— "I'll confess I liked your idea of dramatic justice better than my own. How do you feel now?"

"I'm all right—" rather sourly.

"Fine. A few hours' sleep will—"

"Sleep! You don't think I can sleep, do you?"

"Surely. Why not? Everything's back to normal now. Will you blow out the light or would you rather—"

Cartwright blew out the light then sank into the deck chair.

"Good night, Nelson."

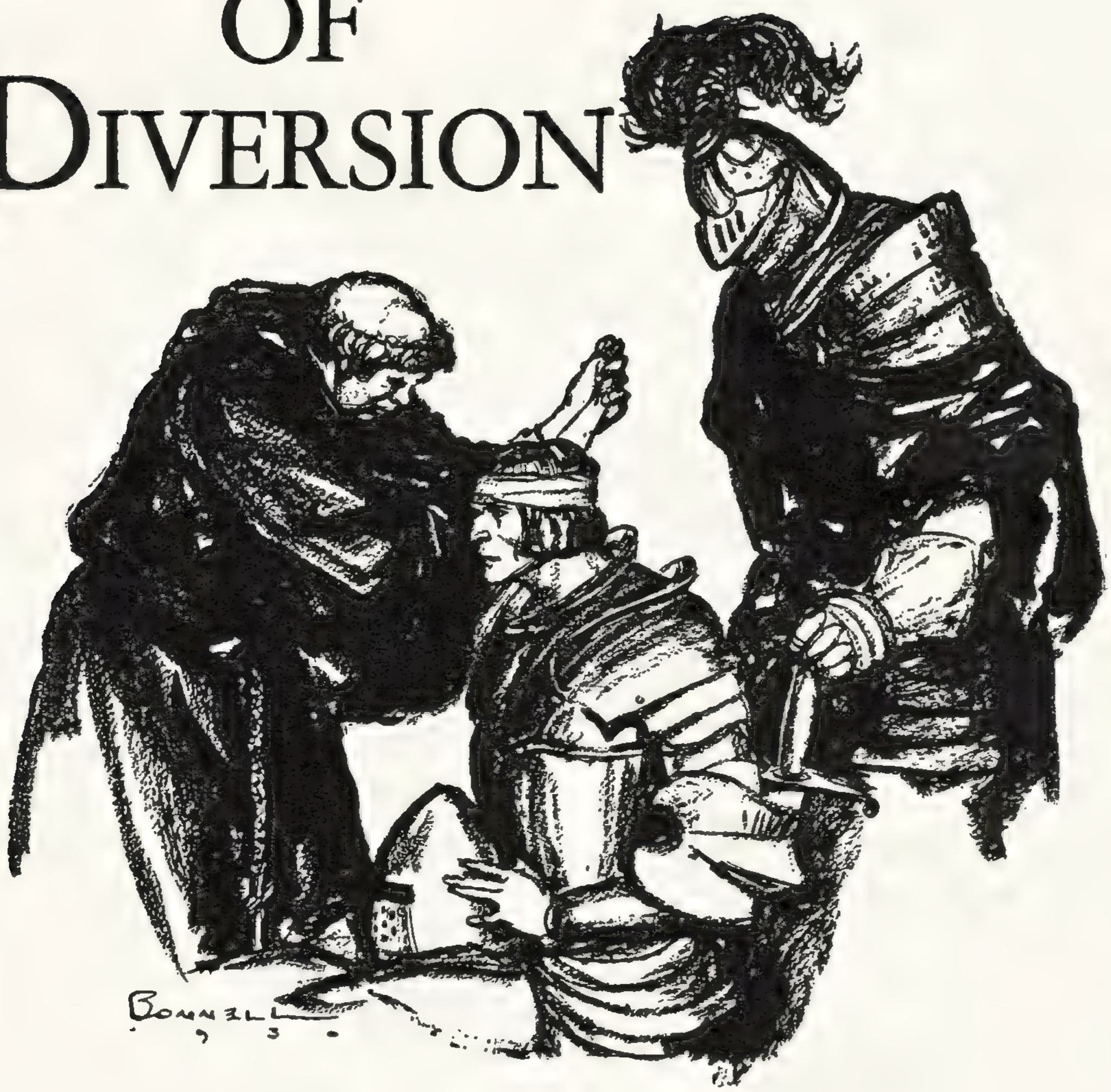
"Good night, my son." A long pause in which the Madeira chair in which Nelson reclined creaked restlessly. "Wish I could stop thinking about that dog. Jara brought him from Benin City, you know, because he was dying of a broken heart and was always trying to find his way back here anyway and— Are you asleep?"

There was no answer. Nelson waited awhile to make sure, then rose from the chair as quietly as possible and still more quietly poured himself about three fingers of Cartwright's Scotch.

He drank it straight without a chaser, then walked softly out to the veranda.

"Whew! What a night!"

OF DIVERSION



A Story of Old Italy

By F. R. BUCKLEY

To the worshipful Messer Paolo Martinelli, leather merchant at the Sign of the Sheep in the Via Lunga at Costecaldo, these; with greetings from L. Caradosso, the old soldier:

GOOD SIR:

I had prepared these few scrapes of the pen for conveyance by your Honor's son, the next time he should come to take his fencing lesson; because he told me, when last here, that his father disapproved of the amusement, as a waste of time. But since a week has passed without his returning (and I was just about to teach him the *rinverso tondo*, which he coveted) meseems likely that your Worship hath made the prohibition absolute, wherefore I send the letter by another hand, hoping that it may have the honor of a reading.

Sir, I will not protest, after the manner

of a merchant, that love alone makes me urge continuance of the fencing lessons; because indeed the few soldi paid by the young man for instruction were very welcome, and provided several small comforts not contemplated in my pension. Better wine, for instance; a tankard of which hath encouraged me to write this; chiefly, believe me, in your Worship's interest, and that of the young man, whom I liked. I could wish that on his deathbed (be it ninety years hence) he should look back over life and depart without dissatisfaction, having enjoyed his sojourn among us; which he will not do, if your Honor persist in keeping him fourteen hours daily in the counting house, forbidding his fencing and (as he told me) urging him to marry the cross-eyed girl of the cloth mercer's. Industry without amusement may make a rich man, but never a happy one. And an unhappy man is a weary companion, even to his own father.

The which (being no preacher save to such soldiers as have in past times paraded under me in dirty equipment or such-like) I will now prove or exemplify to your Honor with a narrative from the life; trusting that the pill of counsel may be gilded by the nobility of the characters to be described. For noble they were—of the noblest; the Trivulsi of Monterosso; Jacopo, the old count, and Gian, his son, who succeeded to the county six months after I became captain of the guard. Jacopo died of cold caught making a progress about his lands.

He was, may I point out, forever making progresses; a function corresponding, in his station of life, to your Worship's counting up of bales, or writing of figures in books. Progresses are weary work for all concerned; and for none wearier than for the noble who makes them. Unless (as Jacopo was) he is blessed with a pearl among captains, he must oversee the details of his escort—which, among fifty soldiers on a week's journey, are numerous beyond belief; and in any case, for the duration of the progress he must live in public, sitting on nothing more comfortable than a horse or a chair of state. For the whole time, he must keep his features ready to produce a smile or frown of the required strength to meet any case; and while so doing he must estimate crops, judge of the effect of taxes, dispense justice in accordance with the customs of a dozen different villages, and so act as to confirm his subjects in their belief that he is of a different flesh from theirs. I have known nobles who sacrificed towns rather than do it once a year. Jacopo did it every three months, and on his deathbed adjured his son to do likewise. It was at this time that my lieutenant went melacholy mad, leaving me to do all the funeral parades by myself.

There was an excuse for him—the lieutenant, I mean; the castle was a melancholy place. It was vast; it was in good repair; it was well manned; and—to show your Worship what was the wealth of this family—it had glass even in the windows of the guardroom. But it was dismal—dismal. Once upon a time, there had been a garden—Jacopo had had it rooted forth, and replaced with a stone building full of accountants. Then again there had been musicians—until the count found their strains interfered with his thinking of new taxes during dinner. And so forth, and so forth. The funeral, hard though it made me work, was the nearest thing to a *fiesta* I had seen since I took office.

But it was soon over; and, knowing the young count, I expected that the future would see a vast increase of dreariness and labor. In body he was the image of his father—tall, and strong built, with eyes that expressed an everlasting hunger to be up and doing; and on the spiritual side he had been a devout disciple. I had talked with him much—never of my adventures, which young men usually desire; always of the cost of armor, the uses of powder guns and the relative effectiveness of horse and foot, considering the difference in their cost. Naturally, I looked forward to a reign wherein progresses would be made every two months, instead of three, and the men forbidden

to unhook their gorgets even in the country; so your Worship may judge of my amaze when I was summoned to the cabinet and told to augment my forces for war.

"War, your Grace?" says I, gasping.

The young count was walking rapidly up and down the room swinging his arm, cracking his fingers, and otherwise behaving as a man who hath more energy than he can use upon his immediate occasions. In various corners of the room were desks with vast piles of papers on them, and mean men shabbily dressed. One of them, catching my eye, winked at me, and I recognized him as a fellow I had known in Rometia—a spy, by name Giovanni Polo. The count stopped suddenly before him.

"Aye, war," says he. "Tell the captain what thou knowest, man."

But while Polo was opening his mouth the count must dissipate more of his overflowing energies in explanation.

"I have remembered what thou told me of the Duke of Rometia his council—his inner council—composed of thyself and such fellows as these. I will have the like, and this is the first meeting of it. These men have been for six months gone in the capitals of four counties surrounding my territory, and there have been two more elsewhere that have been prevented from coming; one by the circumstance that he was hanged last Thursday in Bugasto—whence this fellow also comes. Now; speak."

THE SPY began to drone forth the story of his comrade's taking-off; to which, absorbed in my thoughts, I paid very little attention, beyond noting that the deceased had been barber to the Tyrant of Bugasto, by name Cosimo Rastelli. Seemingly he had cut his master slightly under the chin and been hanged forthwith from the window of the bedchamber; an amusing incident enough, but not, meseemed, worthy of all this pother. Polo had scarce finished his account of it, when the count was at me again. Not content with firing forth words with a force that might have sped cannon balls, he also did enough work with his arms to have tired a blacksmith.

Ah, youth! Ah, strength abounding and overflowing, and to be spent somehow lest it burst its possessor!

"Could not that be made into a cause for war, Luigi?" says he. "Look you. Rastelli is not in good order with his neighbors. The Mantuans have a claim to the village of Cerna, which he denies; he walked into the hall of the Council of Nobles, before Giacomo della Maremme, who is his superior lord, and when Giacomo protested, ran him through the arm; and there are two other princes that I know of whom he hath offended. One of them—the Count of Two Rivers—would join forces with us if we set forth to avenge this barber; he had a passport from my father, thank God, so Rastelli had no right to hang him without trial. And my mother's dowry gives me a claim to the land across the river from Petri."

I was somewhat stunned. It was scarce ten minutes since I had wiped from my beard the last traces of an egg eaten in utter peace, and here I was presented with a complete scheme of polity, a corps of spies and an entire war ready-made!

"My Lord," says I, "er—ah—"

"Well?"

"It—" says I, floundering— "I—er—has your Grace considered what the effect of such a war would be? At best, it would last some weeks; during which time the progresses, and your Lordship's supervision of the county would necessarily cease."

He burst forth again.

"There is no need for half the supervision. The county is so organized that it can be controlled by the council henceforth. There is no more work to be done in my own territories; I told my father so months agone, but he was set in his ways."

For an instant, while Gian marched violently to one end of the cabinet and back again, I permitted my mind to

dwell on the sweet picture of the count and his county—the one young and handsome; the other, according to himself, completed—basking in leisure. I had just envisioned myself commanding a guard whose only duties would be to mount guard and from the battlements listen to the fiddlers in the great hall, when the count returned and drove one fist into the palm of the other hand.

"What we must do now is extend our boundaries!" says he. "Dost thou not see that, Caradosso?"

I did not see it, and I told him so. Under favor, I pointed out that the county was already large enough to return a vast revenue; far too much (though I did not say this) for the needs of any one man, or any one family either—Gian was following his father's practise of laying up the bulk of it in jewels; for which, recently, his son hath been murdered, so I hear. I submitted, under further favor, that what land my lord had was organized for administration; which work, in the case of new lands, would be all to do again. And finally I pointed forth that a policy of expansion must, once begun, be carried on; often (as in the case of the Duke of Rometia) beyond the desires of its initiator.

All of which, it appeared, was just what my lord desired; so that, after some further talk, I left him and applied myself to the making of plans for the war.

Worshipful sir, I will be plain and in order with you: the matter was, that my young master was bored. Brought up by a father who considered music books, hawking, coursing and similar fads affected by other nobles to be sinful waste of time, he had no amusements save work; and, by the improvements of method which he had introduced at the end of his father's reign, he had made unnecessary the very work that should have amused him. Several times during the month which followed that first conference, indeed, I found myself sorry for the gentleman; politics being a work that must proceed by fits and starts, and he being so miserable whenas he had nothing to do save wait. On such occasions he would walk furiously around the battlements, to the disgust of the guards who must salute him at each station; and when that tired him, he would sit in a chair doing nothing save drum on the arm with his fingers. Twice (toward the end of the month, when all action was stopped until such time as Rastelli should reply to the letter of protest) my lord improved these hours of idleness by getting drunk; and, had not the reply been such a defiance as called for immediate war, he might have proceeded thence sweetly to drink himself into his grave, as many a man hath done in his circumstances, and some woman been blamed for it.

As it was, he came merrily with the army to Bugasto; fought all day and schemed all night for three weeks; and emerged from the affair in bull health, with his mother's dower lands to occupy him for the next four or five years.

Had it ended there, it would have been well enough, though the expedition had cost dearly in blood and treasure, and had much discontented the inhabitants of the county, who had been so peaceful and properous before. Had my lord been able to turn his energies solely into the administration of his new lands, without doubt prosperity would have flowed from them sufficient to make up for the crop failures caused by their getting. Of course the dead men would not have returned, but such are quickly forgotten, especially if they died in a good cause.

HOWEVER, and as I warned my lord, conquest conquers the conqueror; and, having by conquest given himself the occupation he needed, the young count found himself committed to many things for which he had not bargained. For instance, his claim to the dower lands was disputed by a cousin of the Medici; to deal with whom (he came at the head of five hundred horse) it was necessary that Gian seek alliance with a Sforza; who chanced to be a blood enemy of our ally, the Count of Two Rivers. Where-

from arose strife with the said count, Gian's life being twice attempted by bravos; until at last we marched upon Two Rivers and, having killed its lord, were forced to annex it.

This was a singular bitter bad campaign—it cost us near three hundred men and raised taxes to such a point that (the crops having once more failed from neglect) the peasants could not pay them; whence a revolt, which cost more lives before it was put down. Revolts are catching. Cerna, the village taken from Rastelli by the Mantuans, was the next to rebel; under our treaty with them, made at the time of the first expedition, we were compelled to help subdue it; and for this service we found ourselves graciously presented with the lordship of two other villages, both seething and working with rebellion.

Having indicated the progress of affairs to which extent, I will enter no further into detail; merely stating that at the end of eighteen months my lord the Count Gian was nearer death from exhaustion, and the county nearer being pawned to the Florentines, than was pleasant to contemplate.

Yet, perforce, he continued—until the summer of the year 1541, when Petri, one of his own principal cities, refused to pay further taxes, closed its gates and rebelled. That summer was a season at which, had he wished it, Gian could have ceased his career of expansion. Those who had opposed him were either dead or desirous of peace; the peasants of his new lands, oppressed past thought of revolt, asked only to be allowed to go back to their fields before these were ruined quite beyond redemption; the merchants of the cities were willing to forget the past, so they could resume their interrupted commerce. Yet, in order to safeguard the flank of those accursed dower lands, which he had watered with blood and from which, as yet, he had not received a soldo of profit, Gian was firm upon marrying one Marietta d'Este. And it was because this marriage would certes involve us in a war with Monterosso, that the people of Petri rebelled.

It was I who carried the news to Gian, where he was sitting with the girl Antonia Mello. Upon the death of her father (thanks to the tangle of agreements, treaties and understandings by which our count was now bound) she had become his ward and lived in the castle. I had long known that she was in love with him; and on this occasion it became plain to me that he was also in love with her. I had a nice eye for such things.

Since the girl knew naught of politics, save to hate them for having caused the death of her father, and Gian could talk of nothing else, these two sat customarily in silence, from which as a rule the count emerged much refreshed. I deduced his lovelorn condition from the fact that, this day, his communion with the lady had left him in a vile temper. He had that morning received notaries with proposals for the D'Este marriage.

"Petri rebelled?" says he.

"To some extent, my Lord," says I, trying to break the news gently. "At least, they have murdered four tax collectors, flooded the moat and hoisted the old flag they had as a free city."

He gnawed his nails.

"It is enough," says he. "Caradosso, it is time for a lesson. There have been too many revolts. We will make an example of Petri."

Whatever arguments there might be against his proposal—which was to sack the city so that it would be an unprofitable desert for ten years—this was no time to bring them forward. Inwardly, I shivered at the prospect of desolation—I had seen cities sacked before, and had heard the women wail; but outwardly I kept stiffly at attention, awaiting orders.

"But the first thing is to reduce the place," says Gian. "As quickly as possible, mark you, Caradosso; I leave it to thee. Take all the bombards and use them without mercy."

"Under favor," says I, "they are no use against such walls. Petri is a strong town. Cats and towers would be better,

if your Grace hath no objection to being unfashionable."

"Do as ye please!" roars Gian, beating the table with his fist. "Only have those gates open for me within the week. Dismissed!"

So I went, heavy hearted, and invested the city of Petri. Part of my sadness was due to the fact that I had friends in the town, and those of such eminence that they would certainly be selected for hanging as soon as Gian should have them in his power; and a far greater part was on the account of my lord himself. So far, by the grace of God, his schemes had led him not too far off the path trodden by the mass of lords; he had fought wars, to be sure, and killed peasants; but all life is a battle, and what else are peasants for? And in peace times—even when new subjects had rebelled—he had been merciful, slaying none in cold blood, and burning no more fields than was necessary. This business of Petri was to be different; here my lord was to sacrifice his soul to his empire and join that black band which contains such as Bertuccio Neri, Cesar the Pope's son, and my former lord of Rometia. From which estate, whose roads lead to hell, there is no return.

How those citizens fought!

THE COUNTRY about Petri was for grazing, and the town made cheese; whereof it always had vast quantities aging in rock vaults constructed to that end. Even had my lord's orders not been urgent, there was no chance of starving the place into surrender; storming was the only way—and a rough way it proved to be. Not content with wielding the usual weapons as though every man of them had four arms, the citizens bethought themselves and constructed rude cannon—hollowed logs, they were; covered with leather and bound with iron hoops—but nevertheless sufficient to knock our towers into matchwood as fast as we could move them up to the walls.

On the first occasion, they concealed these engines until we had actually thrown the drawbridge from tower to ramparts and commenced the invasion of the city; then blew the engine off its wheels with one discharge, leaving me and ten others alone with five hundred of themselves. Their idea was to hold me as hostage; and I defeated it only by diving, in full armor, from the battlements into the moat. I was near drowned before my men could pull me out, especially as the rescue had to be accomplished under a rain of stones and boiling oil; but that was better than being hanged—as my lord would certes have let me be, ere he would have foregone his revenge. The loyalty of a dozen cities depended on his dealing faithfully with Petri; and what was I in the balance?

The second week, having made no headway, I sent for the bombards; which came accompanied by the count, who ordered me to proceed by destroying, first of all, every milch cow in the surrounding country. He was in a worse temper than ever; perhaps because (as I learned from his secretary) the D'Este marriage was set for two months thence, and the girl Antonia had refused to share the castle with another woman. She was to go south, to an uncle in Naples; but despite this fact, I succeeded in begging Gian to let me try one more assault before butchering the cattle. This would give the countryside but one day's respite from ruin; but, truth to tell, I had some thought that Gian might die before the morrow—either by a bolt from heaven or the burning of that internal fire which was visibly consuming him. He seemed ill, both in body and mind. He was in no condition to carry forward his incessant activities; he was weary in the first place; and, in the second, visibly appalled by what he was to do to this city. Yet, he suffered ever from that restlessness which forced him to continue with the only amusement he knew.

I explained this, the day following, to a monk who came in to bind up a cut in my head—we had delivered the assault and been repulsed with heavy losses; those devils on the walls, lacking iron,

had filled up their culverins with crockery, and I, L. Caradosso, had been laid low by half a jug. Gian had returned to the castle, leaving orders that the kine should be butchered on the morrow—within sight of the city walls, too.

"That is a terrible thing," says the monk. He was a round faced, cheery man with but one eye, the other having been put out by Arabs, or it may have been Indians, for he had been to many countries of the East. It was there, he said, that he had learned leechcraft. "No one who has seen deserts, as I have, can think joyfully of turning this lovely land into the like."

"Deserts make deserts," says I; meaning the desert of my lord's mind, bare of aught save these poisonous politics.

This I exposed to the monk to the best of my ability—though not as clearly as I am showing the matter to your Worship; because, truth to tell, it was from this monk, and later, that I learned what I now preach.

He fixed his one blue eye on me.

"It is very strange," said the *fra*, "but I have known the like before. He hath no taste for music, painting, architecture? He might build a monastery, and I could be prior. Or women?"

"He hath no taste for any of them," says I. "They are all vanities—except women, and those for the securing of heirs."

Whereupon I told him of the matter of Antonia, and the D'Este marriage.

"And she will have lovers a dozen, if the count is of the sort ye say," nods the monk, "whereupon he will murder her, and her brothers or her father will devastate the country. Alas!"

He added something in Latin, stood up; and then, looking out of my tent across the green fields where cows still grazed, sat down again. He was a wandering friar, all dusty and with corns on his feet; he had told me that he stayed not over a week in any one place; but now he said that he was sorry for the people of this country.

"They should be left to live and praise God in peace," says he thoughtfully, nodding at the kine. "It would be to my salvation if I could deliver them."

I chuckled; he turned his one eye on me again, and I became grave.

"Who knows?" says he. "I know physic for the mind as well as the body. Look you. Hold back the siege for a week."

My jaw dropped.

"Hold back the—"

"Aye—a week only. There could be no taking of the town in that time; but do not slaughter the cattle. Make some excuse—or I will make it for thee. From here, I go to pay a visit to thy count."

"It will be useless," I told him. "He hath no taste for religion, either."

"If he had, I am a poor preacher," says the *fra*, sighing. "It is not of such matters that I would speak to him. But if thou'rt to kill the cattle, I may save myself the journey; I have a sore foot, and they tell me it is twenty miles to Trivulsi."

He was, as I have said, a most shabby monk; more pitiful than impressive; yet there was something about him—and then, he had been most gentle about picking the jug handle out of my scalp.

"I will delay as much as I dare," says I. "But if my lord sends me orders—thou understandest, eh?"

"Aye, aye," he said, rising; gave me his blessing, and went.

It was dusk, and would be dark within the hour; I had no thought but that he was going to find food, whereafter he would spend the night in our camp; but no, he was gone. With no more ceremony than that, sore foot, darkness and all, he had started forthwith on the walk to Trivulsi.

THE NEXT day we butchered no cattle; my report, sent by messenger, said as much by implication; yet the day following brought no order to repair the oversight. The next day, and the next, we delivered attacks on the south wall of the town, and were beaten off as usual; and of course there was no cattle killing to be done on a Sunday. But by this time, I had come to

fear this long silence of my lord's, and to wonder whether he was not saving his wrath for a greater explosion at last; for which reason, leaving my lieutenant in charge of operations and adjuring him to avoid all jugs except full ones, I took horse and rode to the castle.

And now I will be brief with your Worship; who, they tell me, is master of a hundred thousand florins, and therefore unlikely to heed counsel from one that hath reached old age without garnering more than eighteen wounds and an insufficient pension.

I passed the main gate, and was dismounting in the courtyard, when mine eye was caught by a crowd—castle servants, accountants, and the like—gathered in the angle of two walls; to wit the wall of the tax office and that of the guardhouse. More—the far side of this crowd showed a bubbling or commotion very like that caused by a fight; and, fights and crowds likewise being forbidden—indeed heretofore unknown—within the limits of the castle, I laid hand to my dagger and ran forward to stop this before the count should become ware of it. I had no thought but that the combatants were men of mine bored by castle guard, and amusing themselves regardless of my responsibility for their behavior.

Judge of my amazement to find, on arrival at the outskirts of the assembly, that the principal actor in the scene was Count Gian himself. Aye, there he stood, stripped to doublet and hose, but in a fine sweat nevertheless, exhorting old Valdifiore the treasurer.

"The ball is not to be thrown at me, man," says my lord, "but at the wall, whence it must rebound on my side of the line. If where I cannot reach it, so much the better for thee. Now, again, in the name of God. Here!"

So saying, he dropped from his left hand, and with his right smote, a ball which did as he had described; striking the wall of the guardhouse, and thence returning to strike old Valdifiore in the eye. I thought this a shrewd stroke, but my lord was disgusted.

"For shame, for shame, man," says he, while the treasurer covered the stricken organ with one hand. "The lady Antonia doth better, and she a woman. Is there *none* who—?"

At this point he turned about and saw me; and in another moment had pushed through the crowd to my side.

"Caradosso!" says he, dragging me forward by the arm. "I was about to send for thee. Take off helmet and breastplate and all that leather work. We—"

"Under favor," says I, glancing at Antonia, who stood by. "I should be in nothing but shirt and hose, my lord."

"And wish thyself out of those, my oath on't," says Gian impatiently. "Come, come, man. Now we may show these folk how the game should be played. Stand back, Valdifiore. Look you, Luigi—"

And so he explained to me, flinging out his arms as he was used when talking of politics, and occasionally wiping his forehead with his sleeve, how that one player should strike the ball with intent to make the other player either miss it on its rebound or, running heedlessly to intercept it, to butt his head against a sort of wooden mantlet erected for that purpose. There were other laws which I forget; but the kernel of the game was this hitting of the ball by one player, and the missing of it by the other. Whoso missed it the fewest times was accounted victor; so, knowing my station in life, I began by missing it as many times as I could.

Yet my lord was not pleased. He spared me the example of the lady Antonia (with whom, I learned later, he had been up and playing before cock-crow, when there were none to see) but he did tell me that it was foul shame I should be outplayed by a monk, and he one eyed to boot.

"Monk?" I gasped. "With one eye?"

"Aye. Taught me the game and beat me playing in his robe. Now, Caradosso, come. Imagine thyself at war."

Regarded from which point of view, and with victory not prohibited, it was a good game, and we played it, with scarce a stop for food, until sunset. Once, when I had made the ball bound off two walls

instead of one, taking as my model the ricochetting fire of the bombards, my lord actually clapped me on the shoulder; and when it was too dark to play more, nothing would serve him but that I must come to his cabinet and watch him draw plans of new varieties of rebound. This he did until the morning watch, while I refreshed myself with wine of Orvieto; and then he would not hear of my returning to camp.

"Thou'st left some one in charge?" says he, staring hungrily out of the window at the angle of wall and the wooden mantlet.

"My lieutenant," says I, "and a good enough man, my Lord; but not of great initiative; fit only to hold the siege as it stands, but not competent to push it."

"Ah," says the count absently; and for a moment looked at me with something like his old eye. "Perhaps, concerning that affair I have been thinking—"

HE CEASED there, and once more looked out of the window at the tennis court—that was what he called it. After a minute, and with a seeming effort to collect his wits, he asked me if we had slaughtered the cattle; and upon my stuttering forth some excuse, nodded as if he were not ill pleased.

"I have thought—" says he again; and again stopped; and then his thoughts turned entirely to this accursed game of ball.

I say accursed because we played it without cease all that day, and all the next, whereby I was stiffened as by rheumatism from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet; but to every one else in the county it came as a blessing from above. To the people of Petri, *imprimis*, for on the Thursday morning, when I was no more use for play, my lord charged me with a message for them. It was a long message; and, since my lord was a skilled negotiator even in his underclothes, it said nothing; yet it gave me warrant to meet the syndic of the city under flag of truce and to assure him that the siege might be raised, and the town gates opened, without hangings or razings, or even new taxes.

"But this marriage with the D'Este?" asks the old man; for as I said, this was what they feared.

Upon this point I had no tidings; yet I had seen an emissary of the lady, newly arrived the day before, standing biting his nails unattended for four hours, while my lord played the tennis game with Antonia; and so I told the syndic; and after a week of doubt he came to the conclusion I had reached. The town gates were opened, but it was a week before the Count Gian rode through them in state—and then only for the purpose of seeing if the town afforded any lean and agile men, suitable for opponents at tennis.

Ah, well. I doubt if I have made the matter clear to your Honor, whose mind hath during this reading been fixed doubtless on things more important than happiness; *videlicet* leather. But if this game, by supplanting (as it did) my lord's former game of politics, brought happiness to him and his people, it brought them, no less, prosperity. The count did not wed the D'Este—partly because she said games were the province of mud larks and feather brains; so that war was avoided. Instead he married the lady Antonia, who though landless brought him in some manner (I am not skilled in heraldry) a quit claim to those dower lands which had started all our woes. When, after a year, the bastard of the Count of Two Rivers appeared and claimed his father's estates (ah, what a war that would have been!) my lord referred him to the bishop's court at Rometia, and himself could not even find time to attend the hearings. Whereafter—the claim being allowed—the young man and my lord played tennis together for years, in all peace and loving kindness.

And now I have nothing more to say to your Honor; save that I think that instead of raising monuments (as they have recently done) to their good Count Gian I, to whom they attribute the peace, wealth and happiness they have enjoyed these forty years, the folk of Trivulsi might better carve from snuff colored stone a

humbler figure; that of a monk with one eye; a poor preacher, but knowledgeable as to games. Only I could write the proper inscription, and even so it would be incomplete. Alone I live, of the half-dozen who witnessed his passage through the county; and I have forgot his name.

With my respects to your Worship, and in the hope that this writing may be taken in good part,

—LUIGI CARADOSSO

Post scriptum—The fencing lessons are but five soldi the week.

THE HERO AND THE SLAVE

By HARRY KEMP

THE test of danger is a quiet thing
Despite the braveries that battles bring
Of crashing guns, of combat breast to breast—
And few foresee the coming of that test!
The test of danger is a quiet thing
That seldom walks in thunder driven storm,
Where lightning drives its beak and flails its wing
While in the van moves action's flying form!
But in the quiet of the midst of night,
Or just before the zero hour arrives,
It rises, eye for eye, stanched sight for sight,
To probe the souls in danger of their lives:
That moment sifts the hero from the slave,
And sets aside the coward from the brave;
There is no horror like that suffering,
A moment none can afterward forget
When all the clocks of time in silence set
Focus eternity in one stopped ring!

BLACK ANDY

A Story of the Java Seas

By R. V. GERY

THE MAN that calls himself Jennings told me this, sitting on the stoop of Adolf's place in Macassar. You can generally find three or four of his kidney there—sleazy looking fellows with little left to them beyond a hearty taste for drink at other people's expense; but Jennings, who was introduced to me by a Dutch skipper of my acquaintance, was a lot more interesting than the usual run of them, and he certainly had a pretty taste in narrative. Of course, he may have been a phenomenal liar, but from what I saw of him and his subsequent adventurings, I am inclined to fancy he was just one of those individuals, lucky or otherwise, around whom hectic incident naturally centers. Witness what follows:

D'j'ever meet a feller, an' know right off the bat him an' you was goin' to be mixed up together a sight closer than ordinary? Kind of as if you and him was part of one another, as you might say, an' all there was to do for the two of you was to sit down an' start chinnin', like you'd known one another from kids?

I ain't the marryin' kind—not me; but from what other guys 'ave let on to me when they've been lushed, this here love at first sight must be somethin' of the same affair.

Now, up an' down these Java seas, I 'aven't been what you might call sociable, excep' maybe with the odd girl I've kep' one time an' another, an' of course with the police, damn 'em, once or twice; but there was just one feller, an' if you'll go to the extent of orderin' a couple of drinks—

sangaree for mine—I'll tell you all about 'im. Owgoost Schmidt the Dutchman.

No, an' 'e wasn't a Dutchman, neither; not one of these Hollanders you'll see about Macassar and on the boats. A German, Schmidt was, an' believe me there's all kinds of good Germans. I don't 'old with this enemy business at all, meself, an' no more did Owgoost. Me, I'm English, or was; and Owgoost, 'e come from Bavaria, an' we was partners for a matter of years, an' never a word out of us about what the British did to the Germans or the Germans to the British or any one else in the war. Why should we, I ask yer?

Well, 'e's dead, is Owgoost, an' I reckon if I keep on this sangaree stuff I'm not liable to last much longer; so that it don't matter much if I tells you one or two of the little things we done together. Look well, it will, wrote down; only it's up to you to keep me in booze an' cheroots—

About Owgoost. Samoa, 'e come from; kept a store down there, 'e told me, until the Aussies come an' collared the place. Then 'e packed up traps, sold out what 'e could of 'is stock, an' came up into the islands, lookin' for a pitch. 'E found one all right, an' that's where 'e was when I ran across 'im.

I was down on me luck. No error, I was down on me luck. First off, I'd been workin' for a planter, an' the idjit must go an' let some one—a woman it was, of course—put three inches of a knife into 'im one night, an' leave us all on the beach. Then I went for a piece as foremast hand on a Hollander bumboat; you wouldn't know 'er name, but she opened up like a crocus an' put us in the drink down by Bali. An' then I starved for a bit, an' didn't like it; so last of all I got me a job with old Mah Duck, the chink, keepin' 'is books for 'im. All very nice, if it 'adn't been for 'is wife—women's all mighty well in their place, says I, but not when they've 'usbands 'oo watch 'em too damn' close.

Anyhow, I'd to light out from there, an' run. Run I did, along the shore, all among the land crabs, with the seat of me pants out, an' me spine crawlin' with the notion of Mah Duck an' 'is knife at me tail. Dessay I run ten miles; an' then I sees a godown on the shore, an' a bungalow, an' a man — Owgoost — a-settin' there in whites, smokin' a cheroot.

" 'Ullo!" I says, pullin' up, an' pantin' fit to split.

" 'Ullo!" says 'e, gettin' to 'is feet, an' comin' down the beach to me. "You are in a hurry, my friend."

Well, you'll laugh, but I looked over my shoulder to see if Mah Duck was still after me. 'Strewth I did—that yellow swine 'ad 'ad a poke or two at me didn't do me a bit of good. Owgoost sees the look an' chuckles.

"Gome in," was all 'e said. "Gome in an' sid down awhile, an' then, *ja*, you shall dell me about what is all dis."

He goes up on the veranda again an' gives me a big drink of beer—beer, mind you, in this out-of-the-way hole.

"'Ere's fun," says I, lookin' at 'im.

'E must 'ave been fifty, I reckon; a fair, sleepy lookin' old boy, with a fat belly an' a red cummerbund round it, an' a mustache, an' thick glasses. 'E wasn't quick on 'is feet, to look at; but when you see 'im move, why, says you, 'ere's a nasty customer in a rough an' tumble. As 'e was, was Owgoost.

'E fills up 'is glass an' nods at me.

"*Prosit*," 'e says, very amiable. "You feel some better now, eh?"

"I do," I says. "Thanks to you, mister."

'E puts 'is 'ead on one side an' looks at me old fashioned.

"Excoose," says 'e. "Dere is no need for any thanks. I see you run on the beach, an' why, id is nod for me to inguire. An' I gif you a drink beer. Nodings more. An' now, if you wish, the beach is open, and you may continue your—walk; or, if you wish, dere is a bed here—" And 'e looks at me again pretty odd.

Now, 'ereabouts, you get kind of used to things, an' lookin' for what's behind 'em. That's to say, a feller livin' on 'is own, like this one was, don't go out of 'is way to welcome a stranger comin' runnin' along the beach with 'is tongue down to

'is knees an' a couple of knife cuts in 'im; not unless there's somethin' out of the ordinary in it, that is. 'Owever, there ain't no use meetin' trouble, an' Gawd knows I wanted a bed.

So I says to 'im, "Spoke very 'andsome," I says. "I'll stay. Name of Jennings—" 'Twasn't, of course, but near enough for 'im.

"Chennings, *ja*." He nods, satisfied-like. "A goot name." And then 'e fills me glass up again an' tells me all about 'imself; which ain't usual, as I reckon you'll 'ave observed.

It was around evenin' and we sat lookin' at the sun slippin' into the sea like a big red orange an' chewed the fat about this an' the other thing, a-drinking up of all that beer, an' as sociable as a tree full of monkeys. Schmidt, 'e 'ad a Malay boy to bring the beer, an' there was a shanty down by the sea, with three, four other Malays movin' about, an' a wooden jetty, an' half a dozen *praus*. There was a steamer sailed, 'bout every month, Schmidt said, to take off copra an' *bêche de mer*, an' bring 'im supplies; but generally 'e didn't see a dozen white men, one year's end to the other.

'E begun grumblin' on that lay, in the end, sayin' as 'ow 'e was a lonely man and so forth, until 'e 'ad me fly that 'e'd got somethin' back of it all. As I was sayin' just now, it don't pay to be confidential in these seas—unless you must be. By an' by 'e comes out with it.

"Chennings," 'e says, "I needt another man mit me here. You shtay, an' I gif you food an' beer and a bercentage of profids. Id is all right, *nicht wahr?*"

It was dark, and I couldn't see 'is face; but there was a whole lot in Owgoost's voice that night. One gets to know, by the sound of 'im, when a man's scared, and Owgoost talked just that way.

"Why," says I, "that's a good offer, Schmidt, an' I'll think it over. Let you know in the mornin'—an' now, if you don't mind, I'll turn in. I've 'ad a tirin' day."

Well, believe it or not, that old boy wasn't goin' to let me sleep till I'd answered 'im one way or the other. 'E says no, it's early yet, an' gives me another big drink of the beer, an' talks about the night, and 'ow trade was, and 'ow glad 'e was to 'ave another feller with 'im; an' in a bit, out 'e comes with it again.

"You shtay mit me, an' I treat you fine, Chennings; plenty eat, plenty beer an' *schnapps*, an' a quarter share in profids—" 'E was almost stammerin' with excitement.

'Course, there was somethin' wrong; a man doesn't run after a stranger like that, even in these seas. An' because I was mighty inquisitive to know just what was in this business, more than because I wanted the job, I tells 'im all right at last; I'll stop with 'im.

'E jumps up in a 'urry an' grabs 'old of me 'and.

"Chennings," 'e says, "you are a goot man—a damn goot man. Now you gome mit me an' I show you somedings—"

It was dark, as I think I said, and 'e goes into the bungalow an' lights a lamp. Then 'e calls to me to come in.

THERE was a kind of little room out the back of the store, where 'e kept tubs and barrels an' such-like truck. The door's padlocked careful, an' 'e pulls the key out of 'is pocket, lookin' mighty serious. I knowed then there was somethin' more than a tea party comin', so I wasn't surprised at what 'e showed me stretched out neat as you please on the floor of the little room.

It was a man—'bout forty, 'e must 'ave been, I reckon. Little red feller with a mustache, an' a foxy face, I remember noticin'. 'E was dead; drowned by the look of 'im, although some'ow 'e didn't register as just drowned—not sodden enough, kind of; but 'e'd been in the water awhile, you could see that.

I turns to Owgoost.

"Ho," I says. "So that's the lay, is it? 'Oo's your friend?"

"Dot," says Owgoost, "is joost what I dond't know. On der beach I found him, last night; and drowned I think then he is. But now—"

He stoops down and pulls the man's shirt aside.

'E 'adn't been drowned; not 'im. There was a jagged stab in 'im, enough to finish an elephant.

Owgoost stood there, 'oldin' the lamp an' lookin' at me. 'E was quieter now, an' I believe 'e felt better 'avin' another man with 'im; don't know that I blame 'im, neither, with that kind o' company about the premises. Meself, I looked at the bloke on the floor, an' I says to meself, right off, "*Kris*," I says. There ain't nothin' else, excep' maybe a bayonet, so they tell me, that'll make a rip just like that. An' I'd seen *kris* wounds before.

"Dere!" says Owgoost. "And now what—"

"Some one done 'im in," I says. "Clear as daylight, that is. But 'oo is 'e, an' what did they do 'im in for?"

Owgoost looks at me very odd. 'E was gettin' nervous again, an' I could see 'im wonderin' what to do about somethin'. At last 'e says, makin' up 'is mind if ever I see a man do it—

"Chennings, look at dis."

'Is voice was a creak, an' 'e fished somethin' out of 'is pocket and 'eld it under my nose. 'Strewth, 'e might well 'ave been nervous!

I ain't no sort of a judge of such things, but it didn't take much gumption to see 'e'd got somethin' pretty fishy 'ere. There was four green stones, the size of matchboxes, an' maybe a dozen smaller ones, red an' blue an' white; an' the lot was linked up by a gold chain. Owgoost 'olds them in the palm of 'is 'and under the flicker of the lamp, an' 'e looks at me, an' I looks at 'im, an' I reckon our eyes must 'ave been like soup plates.

"Gawd!" I says at last. "What is it, Schmidt?"

"Gott, 'E knows," says Owgoost, simple-like. "In his pocket I find it. Id is maybe der treasure of Solomons, I tink, or berhaps from off one of der kings of India. Or berhaps—" 'e looks at me most pitiful— "id is after all glass—"

"Glass me eye!" I says. "You never see glass shine like them. Schmidt, these 'ere's worth millions. Singapore, now, or Saigon—"

"*Du lieber Gott!*" says Owgoost, pretty near in tears. "Millions—"

And then the door opens, as quietly as you choose, and there's a woman standin' in the lamplight.

Owgoost an' me must've been pretty badly flummoxed, because we didn't say nothin' at all to 'er until she spoke to us.

"Give it me—it's mine," she says. She was a tall rakin' sort of a thing, with a bit of a hook nose, an' one o' them proud mouths. 'Andsome in a kind of way, I reckon, but gone past it, I'd say; but 'ooever she was, she was pretty much serious about what she wanted.

"Ho," I says to 'er, pullin' meself together. "An' 'oo may you be and where've you sprung from?"

"Never mind who I am," says she, very sharp. "You hand over those stones. I don't know where you got them from, but they're mine."

Well, I just took an' laughed at 'er; it seemed a damn funny kind of a business, this trick walkin' in on us just so, an' pannin' us for what was maybe a couple o' fortunes.

" 'And 'em over, lady?" I asks, mighty sarcastic. "On your say-so? You'll 'ave to find somethin' a trifle more likely than that 'ere. 'Oo are you, anyway?"

BY CRIPES, she pulls out a pistol—one o' them black automatics it was—and there's Owgoost an' me gapin' like a pair o' fools down the muzzle of it.

"Now will you give them up?" she asks.

I reckon I must 'ave been still gogglin' at 'er, when old Owgoost jumps in and knocks the gun out of 'er 'and, flyin' across the room.

"That is nonsense, matame," he says. "Dere iss no use blayin' dricks like dot!"

On me word, 'e might 'ave been an old grandpa talkin' to a kid. The woman stands there, rubbin' 'er fingers and lookin' at the two of us in the lamplight, me still starin' at 'er like a fool, and old Owgoost with them glitterin' stones in 'is

'and. An' then swelp me if she don't fair break down an' start in cryin' fit to bust.

"Give them me," she says again. "They're mine—mine that I've followed half round the world. And Denny had them last—and where you got them I don't know; but they're mine."

Owgoost looks at me and I looks at 'im. I'd seen highstrikes before, of course, and they're easy enough faked; and I seen some pretty shifty bits of stuff in the woman line up an' down these seas; but some'ow this girl—I guess she was more'n a girl, 's a matter o' fact, but cryin' there she didn't look it—didn't seem to register as a crook. I looks 'er over again, and Owgoost says things to 'imself in German, which was 'is 'abit. Then 'e goes over an' throws the door open, an' the light falls on the stiff lyin' there.

"You know him, matame?" 'e asks, mighty polite.

The woman's eyes widen, and for a minute I think she's goin' to flop. Then she pulls 'erself together an' stops cryin' —just like turnin' off a tap.

"Dead?" she says. "Denny?" She talks as if there was somethin' she couldn't get the 'ang of. Then she goes on to herself:

"So—that was it? They got him—but not the stones. Got him—and then threw him overboard?"

"See 'ere—" says I, sudden, for this business 'ad me up a tree, as you might say— "what's all this stuff about?"

She turns on us again, very fierce.

"Was it you?" she asks.

"No," I says. "Schmidt 'ere picked 'im up last night on the beach. We ain't murderers—"

Well, she looks at us again, back and forward, like she can't make up 'er mind; an' then damme if she don't start in cryin' again. Worse this time, too. She fair wrings 'er 'ands, and I took notice then that she'd been 'avin' a rough passage somewheres, for 'er white suit was all stained an' crumpled, an' she was untidy like she 'adn't slept in a bed for awhile.

"Quick!" she says. "Or they'll have you too—like they got Denny here. They're after me now, I tell you, and if you don't give the stones to me, and let me go, they'll have you, too."

"There, there," I says. "Set down an' tell us all about it."

She stamps 'er foot an' she's just all of a tremble.

"No, no!" she says. "There's no time for that—for any of us! If you won't give me the stones,' come with me and we'll try to get away from here, and maybe Andries'll find me, and I can make you see you should hand them over."

"Andries?" I says. "You mean Piet Andries that's skipper of the *Hendryk Van Dam?*"

She nods.

"What d'you know about Andries?" I asks 'er, for 'e was a pretty good friend of mine.

"I—I was on his ship till yesterday," she says, "and so was Denny Morton. We—we thought we'd got clear of them —at least I did—and Andries landed us because he knew they'd found we were on the ship. We thought it safer, and then I lost Denny in the dark and they must have caught him—but they didn't get the stones from him and they'll never let go until they do." And she starts in again cryin' to beat all hell.

"Cripes!" I says. "'Ere's a nice mess! But any'ow," I says, "'oo are they—these birds that done this Denny of yours in?"

SMACK! Just like that a bullet rips through the wall and breaks a bottle on the counter. I'd 'eard that kind o' thing before, an' so'd Owgoost, seemin'ly, for we was both of us on the floor an' the lamp dowsed before 'ooever it was 'ad time to loose off again. Still 'e lets us 'ave another one and knocks a jar of treacle slap off a shelf; we could 'ear the damn stuff drip-drippin' on the floor in the dark.

The woman still standin' there, an' she speaks kind of to herself.

"You see, they've begun," she says. I grabs an armful of 'er, an' pulls 'er down with us.

"Come 'ere," I says. "Where's the sense in gettin' yourself killed, anyway?"

She laughs kind o' bitter.

"You don't know who you're dealing with," she says. "That is only the beginning—"

Another bullet comes whackin' into the side of the house.

"Ho," I says. "I don't know 'oo your gen'leman friend may be, but I ain't goin' to sit down an' 'ave 'im plug me without doin' somethin' about it. Got any guns, Schmidt? P'raps we'd better 'ave a dekko what all this is about."

"*Ja,* I tink!" says Owgoost, and he crawls into the back room, along with the stiff, an' comes back with a couple of Winchesters.

"Redaliate, my friendt!" 'e says, cool as a cucumber, an' poops off one out o' the window.

"*Herr Gott!*" 'e says. "I do not like your friendts, matame!"

"That is Black Andy," she says, very hopeless. "And this, I think, is the end—"

Owgoost puts 'is 'and up, listenin'. Sure enough, outside, there's the noise of a big engine 'ard driven; an' then a blindin' light comes shinin' through the cracks of the door an' windows, and everything inside the store's as light as day.

"Cripes!" I says. "A speed boat, eh? Seem to be in a 'urry, your friends, missy!"

The woman shakes 'er 'ead, an' says nothin'.

Well, they didn't waste no time. First thing we knowed, there's a dozen o' them little one pounder shells—Hotchkiss don't they call 'em?—cracklin' and bangin' on the roof; an' peekin' out o' the window, we could see the gun, cocked up on the nose of a big white launch, stopped maybe a 'undred yards off shore. Owgoost an' I tries 'em out with the Winchesters, but at that distance an' in that light it was like shootin' at the moon; all we got was another dose o' the same stuff, and that sets the thatch alight on a corner o' the roof, an' there you are.

Owgoost grumbles somethin' in 'is throat, an' the woman goes white.

"'Ere," I says. "Time to be gettin' out o' this. We'll be roasted in this shop, sure as a gun!"

Owgoost wriggles over to the back door an' opens it.

"Gome!" was all 'e says, an' we slips out into the shadow of the 'ouse, an' crawls to the trees. It's dark as the devil in there, lucky for us, an' by an' by we're out o' the track o' the light an' I stops to see what's comin' next.

"No, no!" says Owgoost, an' drags me by the arm. "*Schnell*—quick, before dey ged ashore!"

Guess 'e was right, too, for we 'adn't gone fifty yards into the trees when the launch's engines starts again, an' she runs close in. I looks over me shoulder, an' there's half a dozen fellers tumblin' over the side. An' at that I puts me 'ead down, an' runs like the devil with the others.

MAYBE it was a mile before we pulled up. Be'ind us the 'ouse is burnin' good, an' the fellers is shoutin' about it; I reckoned they'd found Denny or whatever 'is name was, an' that give 'em the office the stones was somewheres around. Then, while we was still findin' our breath, they stops 'ollerin' an' things gets quiet again.

"A-ha," says Owgoost. "You haf enough, my friendts?"

"Don't you b'lieve it!" I says. "They're after us, right now."

"Listen!"

The woman puts 'er 'and over me mouth. Sure enough, we can 'ear them cracklin' through the underbrush, an' not so far away, neither. So we turns an' starts runnin' for it again, an' where we thought we was goin' Gawd only knows; only the three of us keeps together, and I can 'ear Owgoost mutterin' to 'imself between puffin' an' blowin'—cusses, I guess.

By an' by the three of us stops, very sudden. We're at the edge o' the trees, and in front of us is the sea. We've been runnin' in a circle, all the time.

There wasn't no good wastin' our breath sayin' things about it; but I

b'lieve we pretty well give up, all three of us—leastways I know I did; Mile End Road'd have looked pretty good to Edward Jennings just then, I give you me word. With them fellers be'ind us, an' the sea in front, we'd no more chance than in hell. Funny thing 'ow that there gun'd opened me eyes, as you might say.

Owgoost sits down on a stone at the edge of the wood an' mops 'is face.

"Und now," 'e says, "what comes?"

'E was as cool as a fish, that old boy, and it's more'n I was, I tell you straight; them fellers creepin' up on us 'ad me in the shivers. As for the woman, she stands there on the sand without sayin' anything; looked like she was tryin' to make up 'er mind about somethin', and a queer sight she was, all white an' silent an' like a ghost. There was a piece of a moon left, an' you could see things 'alf clear in the open; in an hour or so it'd be dawn.

Then she begins to speak, quick an' tumbled-like.

"Listen," she says." This is the end for me, I think. Black Andy isn't going to let me escape, anyhow—we know too much about one another." She laughs to 'erself. "But the stones—you men may be able to get clear, and if you're honest enough, in awhile, after I'm dead, then you'll return them where they belong, won't you?"

She's still talkin' like she's in a dream, standin' there in 'er torn whites on the beach. Then she seems to wake up an' speaks straight to us again.

"Somehow I think I needn't talk to you two about rewards—but Andries'll tell you where they should go. I've been a fool—twenty times a fool—over them; but I'm going to pay for it. And while Black Andy's—dealing with me—take your chance and escape. It's not much of a chance, but better than mine." She 'alf breaks down again. "Promise!" she says.

Well, I arsk yer! There wasn't much else to do. I don't 'old much truck with women, as I said; but this one pretty near 'ad me blubberin', for all I 'adn't more'n a glint of what she was drivin' at.

Owgoost gets up an' puts 'is 'and where 'e reckons 'is 'eart to be.

"Laty," says 'e, "dot is a bromise by me! But first led us see somedings more of these *verfluchte kerls, Herr Gott!* We are men, aind't it?" And 'e slaps the butt of 'is rifle.

The woman takes 'is fat old paw in 'ers.

"Now," she says, quiet, "you two men will walk down the beach awhile—and good luck to you."

Owgoost throws 'is Winchester over 'is arm an' pulls me away with 'im.

"We can at least *caput* three, four of the very damned swine!" says 'e.

"Wot—an' leave 'er like that?" I says. "Not so blinkin' fast."

"Silly mans!" 'e says. " 'Ow else can we get them in the open?"

'Course, there was somethin' in what 'e said. But I didn't 'alf like it, seein' 'er standin' there all alone on the beach; gettin' soft, maybe I was, but still—

Owgoost cuddles down in the edge of the trees, 'is rifle at 'is cheek. It was pretty near light now. A feller comes out 'o the wood, mighty cautious, an' goes up to the woman; I see 'im collar 'old of 'er an' draws a bead on 'im.

"Waidt—stop!" says Owgoost. "There's more to gome."

AN' THEN, next thing I knew, we was both of us floored, with four big men on top of us.

There's times when a fight's worth it, and Owgoost 'e seems to think this is one of 'em, for 'e 'ad one of 'em cold before they got 'im—the man's neck was broke when we picked 'im up next day; I b'lieve I told you Owgoost was like that in a row. But they 'ad us by surprise—more fools we—and in a couple o' minutes there we was, trussed like chickens.

" 'Ere's the ruddy end of it!" I says; and Owgoost, 'e only grunts.

In a minute, 'ere comes the rest of 'em with the woman an' sets 'er down beside us. There's a tall, broad shouldered devil with 'em; 'e's boss, by all reckonin's, and 'e comes over to us.

"So!" 'e says, very ugly. "Three of you, eh?"

'E kicks me in the ribs. "Now, swine," 'e says, "you're going to pass out. But first, where are those stones?"

"I 'aven't got 'em," I says, for there wasn't any use wastin' words on 'im.

'E glares down at me for a minute—'e was a blue chinned feller, with a jaw like a crocodile. Then 'e crooks 'is finger at the rest of 'is crowd—they was white, like 'im, an' a damn dirty lookin' bunch o' tykes at that—an' they frisks me. Then 'e turns to Owgoost.

"And you, my plump old partridge?" 'e says, grinnin'. Owgoost don't do nothin' but grunt at 'im.

Well, I'd made up me mind the sooner it was all over the better I'd be pleased; but next minute I was all itchin' with curiosity again. Owgoost 'adn't the stones, neither.

"What kind of conjurin' trick's this?" I thinks to meself. Black Andy rips out about three feet o' fireworks an' turns to the woman.

"That leaves you, Margaret," 'e says, pretty sour. "With apologies, of course, but—"

They done it. Stripped 'er starko on the beach. I didn't look, nor Owgoost, I guess; funny thing, too, now I come to think of it. Next I know, more pretty stuff from Andy—she ain't got them stones, neither. Fair 'ad me guessin', I'll tell yer; Gawd, I almost forgot what we'd comin' to us.

The woman's been sayin' nothin' at all all this while, but now she turns on this Andy an' fair lets 'im 'ave it.

"It's what I might have expected, I suppose, Andy," she tells 'im, and 'er voice is like a knife. "There wasn't much else for you to do to me, was there? You made a—a loose woman of me, and then a thief, and it wasn't only the stones I stole for you; there was Jim, too, and you remember what I stole from him—for you, Andy. And now, this—"

She sneers at 'im, white and cold in the dim light.

"Go on," she says. "Finish it off, Andy—but you'll not get the stones. They're for Jim—one day! I don't know how, but he'll have them back."

The big feller stares at 'er a couple o' minutes, fingerin' 'is Winchester, an' I thought 'e was goin' to do as she said an' finish it right there. I was still wonderin' what the truth about all this business was, an' 'oo Jim was, an' whether we'd any of us get out of it alive, when this Andy laughs, and that didn't make things any pleasanter, not by no means.

"I'm getting old and silly, I suppose, Margaret," 'e says. "But I haven't time to deal with you properly just now; in fact I don't know that I want to. I want those stones. They're in the house, obviously enough. Well, we must see what we can do towards making these two ducks here talk."

He speaks to 'is mob, an' they picks us up, an' off we goes back through the woods, with us still hog tied, an' the woman walkin' beside us, with 'alf 'er clothes over 'er arm still; an' you b'lieve me, 'twasn't any nice idea what was comin' for us.

IN AWHILE we comes to the 'ouse, an' it's still burnin' good. They dumps us on the ground an' waits for this Andy to say what's next. He's not long about it.

"Now," 'e says to Owgoost an' me, "you've five minutes to find 'em. Then you're going to die, quickly; I'll allow you that much. Otherwise—" 'e shows 'is teeth— "that's to say, if you don't find 'em, I'm sorry, but we'll 'ave to see what fire can make you tell."

An' with that 'e picks up a burnin' stick an' drags it across Owgoost's face, leavin' a big red scar.

"Like that!" 'E laughs, an' Owgoost dodges an' flinches. 'E nods to 'is men an' they unties us.

"Get to it now!" says the big feller, and I see the woman starin' at Owgoost with eyes as big as saucers.

Owgoost gets up, very slow, an' goes across to the smolderin' 'ouse.

"O-ho!" thinks I. "So that's it, is it?"

Well, for a couple of minutes 'e fumbles around, swearin' an' cussin' a lot and burnin' 'is fingers somethin' 'orrid. 'E'll

find the damn' things in a minute, I thinks, an' then we'll see.

At last 'e manages to get into the store room where the stiff was, and 'e looks over the wall—or what was left of it—at me. And 'e winks.

Now, maybe I'm not very fly in a general kind of a way; but in a fix like we was, you get sort of quick at thinkin'. Leastways, I know I did.

"There's somethin' mighty queer goin' on 'ere," I says to meself, and I got ready for anything to 'appen.

Andy and 'is bunch is watchin' 'im mighty close, too, the lot of 'em together; and the woman's standin' apart, lookin' out to sea as if she didn't see any of us . . .

An' then that pot bellied old Dutchman, 'e lifts 'imself up sudden over the wall, an' chucks somethin' slap into the middle of 'em.

"Run, Chennings!" 'e calls to me. "Run like hell!"

I gives one look at the thing 'e'd thrown, an' you can bet I runs.

D'j'ever see a dynamite cartridge? I mean one o' them affairs they use in these parts for blastin' coral an' such-like. Brown candle, an' a fuse at the end, they look like, and easy enough spotted, once you've set eyes on one. B'lieve me, I didn't run so plucky far—not me; by the time the fuse went pungo, I was flat on me face with me nose in the dirt.

I picks meself up when the world's stopped flyin' about me ears, an' looks round. First thing I sees is Owgoost, grinnin' over 'is wall; and then there's a mess o' fellers on the ground, most of 'em still enough, but the rest kickin' like a shoal of fish. 'E'd got 'em very pretty, 'ad Owgoost.

"You old devil—" I begins; but there's where I stop. The woman's on 'er feet now, an' by all accounts she ain't hurt.

"Andy," she says. "Black Andy—where is he?"

We looks round. There's 'alf a dozen of 'is fellers, all more or less done for, lyin' about; but this 'ere Andy's gone missin'. Funny, I thinks.

But there ain't no sign of 'im. 'E's clean gone, that ugly devil. Owgoost steps over the wall an' looks at the fellers on the ground.

"So!" 'e says, contented-like, bendin' over them. "It aind't goot, blayin' der monkeyshines mit old Owgoost, no?"

And then there's a steamer's whistle outside, and the *Hendryk Van Dam*, with 'er old brown funnel an' dirty white deck houses, as I'd seen many a time; and 'er boat comin' ashore, with Andries and a couple of other men in the stern sheets of 'er. One's Van Tromp, the p'lice inspector; I knew 'im well enough, but just now I'd nothin' very much on me conscience; an' the other's a big fair chap I'd not seen before, but with "English" written all over 'im. They jumps out o' the boat an' comes up the beach; an' gorblimey if the woman—that's 'eld up through it all so far—don't scream out "Jim" an' go off in a flop. The big feller comes over quickly an' kneels by 'er, and it's easy seen 'ow it is with 'im.

Van Tromp looks round at the blokes lyin' on the ground an' then grins at Owgoost an' me.

"Almighty!" says 'e, which is a partic'ler word of 'is. "It seems I am a little late. I have a warrant for these people."

"There's one missin'," I says. "An' you'll be lucky to get 'im, if I'm a judge."

The man called Jim's got the girl to 'er feet now, an' they comes toward us, 'is arm round 'er shoulders. Somehow or other the 'ole business comes clear to me in a flash, and it don't need me 'earin' Van Tromp—'e was always a stiff sort of a little feller when there was any of the 'igh-ups about—callin' 'er "my Lady" and 'im "my Lord" to see 'ow matters stood. They stands there, kind of 'and in 'and, the man—I see now 'e's a fine big buck of a feller—chattin' with us pleasant, an' the woman not so very far from tears; an' then Owgoost, 'e pulls a grin all round 'is face an' puts 'is 'and in 'is pocket.

"Yours, I tink!" says 'e, and 'ands the stones over to the man.

"No," the man says. "My wife's, as always—whatever may have happened."

And we'd forgot Black Andy—by cripes we 'ad! There's a crack from the wood, Van Tromp curses in Dutch to blister paint, an' the woman drops in 'er 'usbands arms.

I don't rightly recollect what 'appened then. I know the bunch of us bolted for the wood together, and as we come to the edge of it the man called Jim passes me like I was standin' still. Then Van Tromp calls to Owgoost an' me—the skipper's bendin' over the girl on the sand—and stops us.

"Let him alone," he says. "Better so!"

Five minutes goes, and maybe ten. The four of us stands there, lookin' at the trees. There isn't any sound, excep' the wash of the waves on the beach, and our own breath, comin' 'ard an' fast. An' then the bushes parts, an' the man comes out, wipin' 'is 'ands; there's a cut on 'is brow and 'is eyes isn't any ways pretty.

None of us says a word to 'im, and 'e strides down to Andries and 'is wife on the sand. 'E kneels beside 'er an' takes 'er 'and.

Andries, 'oo's been lookin' 'er over, suddenly claps 'im on the shoulder.

"No, *mynheer*," says 'e in 'is gruff voice. "There ain't no need for that. Dot *schellum* shot wild; see, dare is joost a scratch on the head, *ja*."

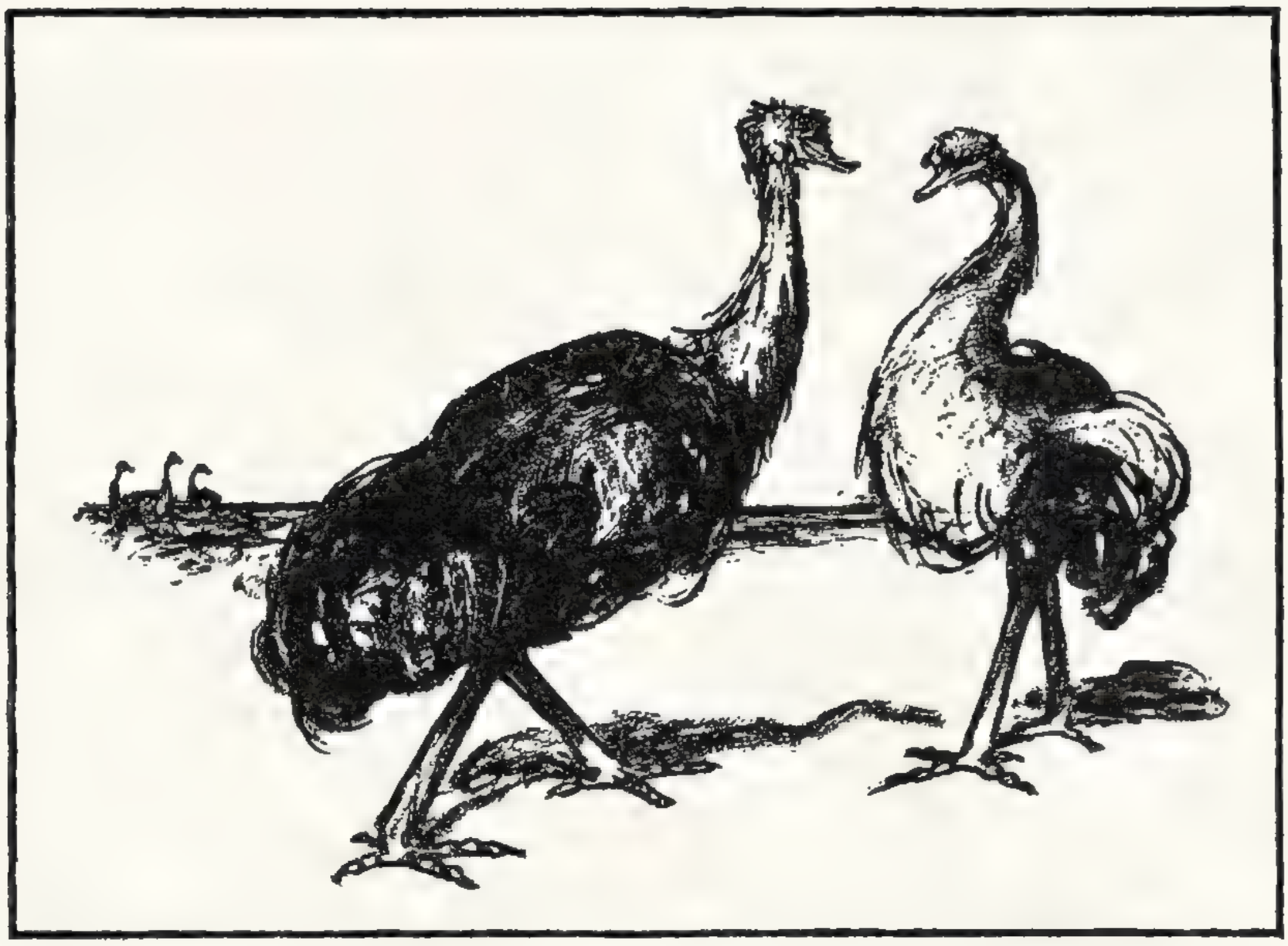
And with that the woman opens her eyes, and the lot of us takes a walk on the beach.

* * *

Jennings swallowed his eighth sangaree, rolled upon me the eye of a lascivious pug, and got shakily to his feet.

"There," he said thickly. "If that wasn't worth the price of a couple of cheroots an' a few drinks, I don't know what you want. Dirt cheap at the price, I calls it!"

And that remarkable gentleman went weavingly out into the night.



A FLURRY of FEATHERS

A Tale of Australia

By HENRY G. LAMOND

THROUGH the long grass near a watercourse a black shadow was creeping, neck outstretched, its body crouched. Silently and with the calm deliberation of time itself that shadow edged away. It was an emu hen. Back under the shadow of a *coolibah* tree her cluster of a dozen blue-black eggs lay scattered on a bare patch of ground. To her in her brooding had come the ground vibrations of an approaching animal in motion. Her law said distinctly that no hen emu shall rise directly from her nest, thus betraying its presence. First she must slink through the grass, putting distance between herself and her treasures, and then she may show herself.

A hundred yards or more from her nest the emu rose from the grass and stood erect. A shade over six feet she was from the top of her head to the ground; dark in color, almost black; with flipper-like appendages which hung helplessly from her shoulders, being her rudimentary wings; with a bare head helmeted with burnished bronze, and with her plumage hanging listlessly—almost, if it may be so expressed, an avian weeping willow.

The most outstanding feature, perhaps, was the smallness of her head compared to the rest of her body. Emus have brains—that goes without saying—but the limited capacity of those brains makes of them almost the most foolish of all birds.

For one second the hen looked, standing in statuesque rigidity. The approaching animal whose hoof beats had disturbed her was a horse. That was nothing. But this horse carried a man. That demanded instant action. It was too late to crouch and hide—that emu knew she had been seen—and the only thing left to do was to preserve her nest and eggs.

Emus may have but little brains. Hen emus when brooding have tons of pluck. That emu followed the rule of indomitable bravery which all nesting mothers show—she risked her own life in defense of her eggs. With a sudden start, almost as though she had been fired from a catapult, the hen charged toward the horseman. When within ten yards of him she faltered in her stride, staggered, shot off at a tangent, and by all the wiles she had at her command she induced that man to chase her.

Then, when he had fairly started in pursuit, that emu lay down to it and put out all she had to offer of speed. Her head, body and neck were stretched in one straight horizontal line. Her ridiculous bundle of feathers, which was her tail, bobbled and danced ecstatically to her every stride, and as her toes bit in and gripped the ground in her giant strides she left tiny cloudlets of dust floating in the still air behind her.

But that escape was easy. On level ground no emu may run away from a man decently mounted. In broken country and among watercourses no horse may pace it with an emu. The hen shot across a couple of gullies, sped past a clump of timber, dodged through some trees and was lost to sight on the other side. But she still held on, throwing miles behind her, long after the man had discontinued the chase and gone his way. Then at last, somewhat perturbed and panting, the hen returned to her nest.

Warily she came to it, her head and neck outstretched, her eyes gleaming and scanning for danger, her feet light as velvet and noiseless as night in her approach, and when she saw that all was safe she went to her eggs with a little whistling of contentment in her throat. There were a dozen eggs—twelve exactly—and they lay scattered where she had disturbed them when leaving.

Almost any other bird would have settled on the nest and pushed the eggs under her breast with her hooked neck and bill. The emu did things differently. She settled on the ground some distance behind the egg nearest her. Then with her knees together, and with her stilts of shanks spread funnel-wise, she shuffled along the ground toward the collection.

That gathered the eggs together, rolling them in a heap toward the center, and when the hen had finished her job and given one recalcitrant egg a dab with her beak to knock it under, there was not one blue-black oval in sight.

Next morning eager chippings sounded in those shells, and for the next twenty-four hours wet little bodies struggled out of their housings and snuggled up against their mother's bare hot thighs. Occasionally the hen would reach under, peck discarded half shells and eject them from the nest. But during that twenty-four long hours she never stirred from the nest, and moved not at all except to shuffle slightly as a youngster beneath her wrestled for a more comfortable position.

That sacred period passed without incident, and next morning that mother emu stepped from her nest with ten striped bundles of down cheeping and chirping behind her. Two addled eggs remained, to rot and fade in color, or to crack in the sun and let their contents ooze into the parched ground.

For two days, or it may have been a week, the hen guarded her flock, and be it said in all honesty by that time she was getting mighty tired of them. There is nothing more beautiful in all bird life than an emu chick, and nothing which would, or should, incite a greater degree of mother love. But the emu hen's inclinations do not run in that direction. When a cock emu appeared, one who may or may not have been the father of her chicks—probably not—she welcomed the muffled drumming which told of his ap-

proach and surrendered her babes with no show of regret.

He was a shade taller than she was, a good deal sturdier, darker in color, and his bronze helmet had lacings of scarlet. He took the chicks. He led them to food, foraged for them, showed them the way to water and, early winter that it was, when he sat down at night the little fellows snuggled up to him and hid beneath him in perfect confidence and comfort.

The cock bird kept the chicks a couple of months. By that time they had shed their striped down of zebra markings which harmonized so well with the grass and ground when they froze in perfect immobility from some fancied enemy. Their life was far from monotonous, and danger was always in the offing.

Once, in answer to their guardian's quick whistle of warning, they had run for the shelter of grass tussocks. One little fellow, finding the stool for which he aimed already pre-empted, turned and sped across a bare patch of ground for another. And in the midst of that flight, while his little legs were spinning like the revolving spokes of a whirling wheel, death had fallen on him from the skies!

With a *Whi-i-s-sh!* of torn air and a mighty ruffling of wings an eagle hawk had clutched him as he dived for shelter and squeezed the life from him in one convulsive kick. Others had suffered other fates. With seven chicks following him that cock emu strutted across the plains.

But curiosity is an emu's besetting sin. They simply can not resist the temptation to investigate the unusual, be it sight, sound or smell.

ACROSS the plain three aboriginal bucks were on a hunting expedition. The cock emu saw them. He knew the danger they portended. He turned and led his flock away from the blacks. But when he turned to look again, just before breaking into a run, the men were not in sight. This, from the emu's point of view, was a matter requiring attention.

He stopped and stared in the direction in which he had last seen the boys. Then from above the waving grass a pair of things broke into view, kicking and struggling in a most ludicrous manner. At the same time a faint wailing came floating along the wind. Really, it was one of the bucks, wise in the ways of emus, who had lain on his back and kicked his legs in the air, at the same time crying in a weird voice.

This was too much for the emu. Drawn as by a magnet, he approached those kicking legs and the source of that strange sound. With many false starts of alarm, with his neck of feathers fruffed, with his beady eyes glistening, and with a continuous throaty whistle and with his head extended he came nearer and nearer.

As he drew closer the boy on the ground elaborated his actions. Now his legs swung in circles, breaking their continuity to kick and struggle, and his plaintive cry had dropped to a low murmur.

A couple of times the emu spurted and jumped sidewise from something which was not there. Once he circled, forever keeping his eyes on those entrancing abnormalities doing an air dance, and then when he was but a short five yards distant, one buck bounded to his feet and a hissing sob followed by the dry gulp of rent air sounded.

The emu sprang madly, bounding in the air and turning as he jumped. He hit the ground, bounded again and landed on his side a full ten feet away with a spear right through his body and with a couple of feet of its barb showing on the other side of him. He struggled and kicked, raising clouds of dust as he scratched his way round in a circle.

Once he staggered to his feet, only to fall again when he essayed his first stride. And then a great sigh came from him, and he stretched his neck along the ground in death, as with a derisive whoop one of the boys clubbed him with a stick.

The chicks had scattered, plunging head first into the nearest tussocks of grass and lying still as soon as the danger had

come to them. After an hour, with much plaintive meowing and hissing whistles, they came together again. For a day or two they wandered disconsolate, and then another cock picked them up and took them, figuratively, under his wings.

Months passed, and the chickens grew apace. By the end of December they were full plumaged, though still reliant on their guardian. The season was good and the emus fared well. Though *gooyeh* apples were off, there were *coonga* berries in plenty, the Mitchell grass was in full seed and, though it is not generally conceded that emus do such things, many a fat grasshopper went the way of flesh with them, and odd bush mice and carney lizards took the road from which no traveler returns.

They strode across the downs at the heels of their leader, stripping the Mitchell seeds as they went, pulling berries where berries were to be found, and generally faring well. Then, suddenly, the old bird's foot hit the ground with a resounding thump, calling them to attention, and the cock himself never hesitated in his going. He went!

The chicks streamed after him, peeling the rind of miles as they ran and throwing distance behind them. From the rear came a pattering of feet in pursuit. The old bird knew. Perhaps the youngsters had some premonition of danger. That pattering was a dingo! Steadily it drew nearer, and the cock dropped from the van and took up his position in the rear. Suddenly spurting, he passed through the cluster of running chicks, and as he passed he zig-zagged and cut that cluster into single units. A sweep of his claws took one fellow and sent him spinning yards out in the grass. Another sweep sent another in the opposite direction. A peck from his bill as he raced knocked another little one off its balance and sent it off at a tangent, and when that old cock bird had gained the lead his covey of chicks were scattered as a handful of rice thrown at random, and all were going different ways.

The dingo might, and probably would, get one of them. The mob, though, apart from that one, was safe. Thus does an old emu scatter its troupe when pursued.

Later that evening, by some weird form of telepathy perhaps, or maybe by some prearranged meeting place, that family came together again. But only six chicks answered the roll. Out on the plains a cluster of feathers and scattered fragments of bone and flesh told where a dingo had made a meal. It also gave evidence of what had happened to the missing chick.

Life continued with its little ups and downs for that family till the first cold breath of the coming winter smote the land. By that time, practically twelve months old, they were almost full grown. The young cock birds showed a certain immaturity. But the little hens, dear little débutantes that they were, could only have been distinguished from older hens by the slimness of figure which the youngsters possessed.

Now the old cock's helmet shone a brighter burnishing of new copper; the scarlet lacings were more flame-like in appearance; and his guttural boomings were deeper in intensity and more reverberating. The young cocks were possessed of a certain restlessness, but they still stayed with the brood.

While the youngsters of both sexes were playing together one day something suddenly annoyed the old bird. With his neck feathers standing out like a starched mop, and with his neck inflated like an outgrown German sausage, he rushed the youngsters. He cut out the males, hectored them and drove them from the mob.

At any attempt to return on their part he met that advance with a savage rush, with a snapping beak and with wildly swinging claws. One youngster, trying once too often to return to his mates, was sent spinning in the dust as the old bird met him chest on in a whirlwind rush.

By night he had convinced the youngsters they were not wanted, and at the head of his little brood of three hens, belligerent if need be, savage and prepared

to fight for his rights, he shepherded them and kept them with him till each had selected her nest and laid her eggs, and the mating season had passed.

OF THE three young cocks thus thrust forth into the world one fellow was bigger than his mates, faster, stronger, and of a darker color. He was almost black. Although the emu hens reach maturity at one year, and most of the cocks remain in ignorance of sex until their second year, this dark fellow was already showing burnishings of copper on his helmet, and his sibilant whistlings would occasionally break into the deeper drumming of an old cock.

The three young cocks strayed dejectedly about the plains. They met plenty of other emus; but those select mobs had no toleration for the young males, and the lord at the head of each brood fought them off. They met other mobs of evicted males. But each of those mobs had a secret hatred and no invitation to band was given or accepted. Gradually the three split up, caring less and less for the others' company, and individually they foraged for a living.

Shortly after the dissolution Darky, walking through a belt of *boree*, chanced upon an old hen. She was a mother of several and grandmother of many. She, solitary and morose, was seeking a mate. As soon as Darky saw her the quills along his neck began to rise; the copper of his helmet took on a more burnished hue; the scarlet lacings became more vivid, and his throat swelled as he grunted boomingly.

The old hen came to meet him. With weaving necks they approached each other; with a stuttering of chattering bills they came closer, and then Darky danced round the lady he courted. He jumped erratically on his long stilts of legs. He took fright at nothing and raced away twenty or thirty yards. He stopped abruptly, pivoted on a pin's head, as it were, and raced back to the hen. He scratched the dirt in clouds; he pecked pebbles from the ground and threw them aside; and then, stepping mincingly, he came nearer and nearer.

For three days Darky stayed with his bride. Walking with her across the plains, they came upon a solitary old bull emu—a fellow who may have lost his brood, or who perhaps, due to an early season, had dispensed with them. He came toward Darky's hen with his neck arched, with his neck feathers erect, and stepping high. She, gay old girl that she was, pretended a fickle coyness worthy of a pullet. She sidled and sighed; she whispered and pretended to flee, and forever she was drawing nearer to this great old fellow who stalked toward her.

Though Darky was only a youngster he knew the law of the plains—there is no right but might! He came out to do battle with this stranger who would usurp his privileges. He boomed threateningly; he scratched the earth and threw dust over his back; he swelled his neck and bristled his feathers and he pecked pebbles and threw them aside.

The old bird did not even deign to go through these preliminaries of battle which etiquette ordained. He saw only an immature cock opposed to him—big for his age, perhaps; but only a youngster —and he charged. With his head held out straight in front of him, with his eyes glinting fire, with his feathers fluffed and with his absurd stumps of wings spread, he came with a rush like a charging express.

Darky went down, unable to stand before that rushing avalanche of fury. He hit the ground, rolled clean over and, in attempting to struggle to his feet, was sent spinning again. It was enough. Darky was only a boy, as it were, and his opponent was a full grown man. Darky picked himself up, evading another sweeping blow of those murderous claws, and fled unashamed and in terror.

The big fellow did not even consider his foe worthy of pursuit. He turned with many gurglings and boomings, with sibilant whisperings and arched neck, and went to the hen who was now his.

Darky wandered alone till the nesting periods were over and hens collected in mobs. With them and other young bucks, and with the summer's heat coming, all thoughts of pairing and mating were in abeyance till next winter. Over the plains old cock birds strode with peeping chickens at their heels, and the youngsters drew together and joined other colonies of hens.

As the summer advanced, and the rains which should have been early were delayed, the grass went off rapidly and feed for the emus was scarce. Though they are among the first of all things to feel the pinch of a drought, there was sufficient food to keep the emus alive, even if a little weak in strength. Particularly was care necessary at drying waterholes with muddy banks. Though an emu has a good spread of claw, should it break through the crust of mud, then is it doomed. Its long legs sink deeper and deeper from struggling; and held miserably the emu is condemned to death in that prison.

Darky, the biggest bird of his mob, had to be particularly careful. An emu has small brain power, and its ability to reason is nil; but the instinct handed down ten thousand generations is always strong within it. Approaching a boggy hole, Darky would walk warily, testing each stride ere he put weight on his foot, and all the time stepping as if crossing broken glass. At the first indication of the crust breaking beneath him, he would sink to his knees, laying his long legs along the top of the mud and allowing his massive breast to ease the weight on his feet. In that position he was secure.

If, as usually happened, that position brought him within three to four feet of the edge of the water, that was all he wanted. From there he could reach forward, scoop a mandible of water, lift his head and let the water gurgle deliciously down his long neck. And always when leaving the water the same procedure was followed.

In the dim long ago predatory beasts used to wait for their prey at the water's edge. Though Darky did not know the reason, the habit remained. Never on any occasion did he walk straight out from water. Always he sprang to his feet, jumped sidewise, ran a few yards, propped, swung in his stride and zigzagged in erratic lines and sporadic bursts of pace till clear of the trees lining the water hole. Out on the plains, with a clear view round him, he was safe and again fell into his stately walk.

Summer passed, and the bounteous rains of the wet season came. And again the first cool tinge of winter blew over the land. The young cocks of Darky's generation were all now mature. Darky himself was a noble bird. He stood fully seven feet from the crown of his bronze helmet to the soles of his feet, deeper in color than any other bird, thicker and heavier in plumage, more massive in body, fleeter of foot, and with an ambition above his age.

When the mating season commenced, and what time old cocks were hunting young bucks from their broods, the big mobs of old hens and young bucks split up and paired. Thus did Nature observe the sound rule of eugenics: old mates with young; young mates with old.

But that was not enough for Darky's great heart and soaring ambitions. One solitary old hen would never do; he sought a brood. But all the broods were in charge of the cocks who had reared them. Darky roamed the plains in search of that which he sought. He found it.

COMING out of a patch of *gooyeh* apple trees, where they had been feeding, he saw a brood with an old cock at its head. The young bucks had been dispersed and only five pullets remained. Darky never hesitated. Booming deep down in his throat, and with his neck arched, he advanced.

Be it said to his credit, the old cock took up the challenge almost as soon as it was issued. He stepped out free of his mob, which clustered in an interested circle, and as he strode forward his quills rose and

his neck swelled. He came forward eight or ten paces, boomed once, scratched the ground in waving billows of dust over his back and tossed pebbles to each side of him. His neck was weaving in snake-like undulations, and always he kept his eye fixed on his opponent opposite. Then, the preliminaries complete, he stood and stretched himself to his full height, his mighty chest swollen and throwing iridescent rays of light as the sun struck it.

Darky advanced a few steps and stood still. Standing there, motionless as graven statues, the two gladiators surveyed each other. Each was a magnificent speciment of his breed. If anything, Darky, even in spite of his youth, had a slight advantage in weight and size. But the other bird more than compensated for that in experience, in strength and, as a tuft of white feathers on his flank testified, by wounds achieved in battle. Each was in the full flush of arrogance brought on by the lust of the mating period, and each belligerent fiend was armed with claws to stab and tear, with straining muscles to drive home that death, and with the will to do.

Each bird held his head thrust forward but a foot or more above the level of the ground; each was weaving backward and forward, shuffling with excited little steps as though finding irksome beyond measure the preliminaries of battle, and each pair of eyes shone red and almost seemed to shoot flame. Then, as though fired from respective catapults, each bird charged!

They came full tilt, heads outstretched, flap-like wings extended, and behind each bird a ribbon of dust rose and floated in the wind. When but a few short inches separated them, and almost as if the very wind itself held its breath before that stupendous smash, both birds left the ground, apparently to bring their claws into play, and met full chest to chest. For a snatch of time they staggered to that awful jar, seeming to stand still in midair, and while a mighty gasp came from each body they fell to earth again. And even as they hit the ground each bird sprang forward.

In a whirling medley they closed! Each reached across the other's shoulder, getting a grip with the beak at the base of the other's wing. This, perhaps, was an age old instinct handed down ten thousand times ten thousand generations from the time when emus' wings were of a size to be used in buffeting blows when fighting. Now that grip served no purpose other than to grapple them closer, and chest to chest, grunting and heaving, they strained and wrestled. In each case the free wings of the birds were sweeping in agitated curves, striving even in their futility to effect some damage. At every swing and shuffle of that desperate wrestle, when one leg was free, the bird would raise it in an effort to drive a death smashing rip to his antagonist. Every time that blow was nullified by the nearness of the other, and naught but a few stray feathers floated in the air.

By mutual consent, it seemed, the birds broke free and stood back. Each was panting with gaping beak. Each was disheveled and covered in dust. And in each eye the light of battle still flamed. They shuffled round each other, sparring for an opening, and as they walked the dust rose from the torn ground beneath them.

The hens for whom this desperate war was waged stood round in a circle. Their necks were craned forward; their eyes were bright with interest and excitement; and nervous little whimperings and hisses of pleasure broke from all of them. Without doubt they knew the reason of the fight; there could be no shadow of a suspicion that they did not know the rights the victor would claim.

But though he of the white tuft had been their guardian through life; though he had protected them and led them—let him be vanquished and his victor could claim them with not one show of outward regret on their part.

The warriors had closed again. Darky had leaped suddenly, throwing his legs forward as he rose, and though the other had twisted with the agility of an eel, one of Darky's claws had torn a great furrow down his side—a furrow from which a

line of feathers floated free and on which bare skin beneath a red weal leaped into being. And ere Darky had recovered his balance after his return to earth the old bird had reached across and got him at the base of one wing. He pressed in, lifting as he came, and he almost raised Darky from the ground. He shook and worried as a dog does a rat, and in a maelstrom of rage and inferno of hate death rode on the shoulders of both warring birds.

Darky staggered to get free, was shaken again, and then a driving smash took him and sent him reeling to earth. Like a flash of flame the other leaped, kicking as he came, and down Darky's thigh a bare weal showed for a second, glowed dull red and commenced to drip blood. But he managed to shake himself free, to stagger to his feet in spite of that devilish fury pounding him, and then again he closed and juggled with death in his berserk rage.

Again the battle eased and both birds stood back. The ground over which they fought was churned to dust; the grass was flat and chopped to chaff; both birds wheezed as they sucked in great gusts of air to their panting lungs, and blood trickled from them and dropped to the thirsty ground. Slowly, still facing each other, they backed away, stepping deliberately and feeling the ground carefully as they trod. Back they went, back and back, till a full twenty yards separated them. Then they charged!

This time no effort was made to rise and strike as they came together. Neither attempted to evade the charge, and one flick before they met each head was thrown high so the full impact might be effected. It was shock tactics, pure and simple. They met, that dull thud seeming to shake the very ground beneath them and vibrate the air about them. Both birds staggered at the shock, and then again they backed away from each other.

Once, twice, three times those awful battering rams in feathers met with a smash which nothing could withstand. The fourth time the older bird winced just a shade before the collision, and by that evasion was taken partly side-on by the full chest of Darky. It staggered him, sending him reeling to one side, and before he could recover his foe was on him.

Biting, kicking, striking, buffeting, smashing and wrestling, Darky bore the older bird over, over and over till, his legs crumbling beneath him, he sank to the ground and lay there sobbing with panting breath and closed eyes, his long neck stretched along the ground.

Chivalry to a beaten foe does not come within the category of emu law. With a grunt of rage Darky sprang on his antagonist. He tore great bundles of feathers with his wrenching beak. He clawed and ripped with his talons, tearing great weals and opening quivering wounds. He jumped on the bird on the ground. He lay on him and pecked viciously. He rose and raked him fore and aft with eviscerating claws, and then, whinneying huskily in his throat, he went to that outstretched head. He took it in his beak and lifted it from the ground, shaking and worrying it as he did so, and at that serpentine neck hanging limp he drove a mighty blow.

It may have been design, though most probably it was purely chance, but that blow ended the fight. As the deep thump told its landing, a lighter *click* spoke of something breaking. The head fell from Darky's beak, dropping limply and lying inert on the ground. That last blow had broken the beaten emu's neck.

Darky walked round his motionless foe. With him there was none of the fear of the dead of his own kind which some animals show. He ripped and tore that unresisting body. He clawed and pommeled it till even his great hate was satiated, and then he stood back.

The hens gathered round in an admiring circle, twittering excitedly. As Darky came to them he held his head high, his beak stammering in convulsive snaps, and as one came forward to meet him he extended his bill to hers. They entwined their necks, standing there chest to chest,

and from their throats rose streams of stuttering sibilants and whistling whispers.

Darky leaned toward one young hen. In nervous fear she jumped from that caress and danced gaily round him with agitated strides. One hen after another met him, whispered her admiration and love, and then jumped away from him and ran round even as the first had done. They were his—they acknowledged it.

Darky boomed once, swelling his neck and ruffing his quills. Then, without a look behind him, he strode across the plains, his captured brood following obediently at his heels.

FLOTSAM ISLAND

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

DOMINATED by an active volcano, surrounded by conflicting tide rips and currents, having no harbors and only one comparatively safe anchorage, Babuyan Island, America's least known possession, and possibly the least known of any bit of land in the Pacific, rises out of the sea some forty miles off the northern coast of Luzon.

No law exists on Babuyan Island except the edicts of its king, Bernardo Rosales, forger of sword blades in Angat, Luzon, former fugitive from justice, and the only inhabitant of the island who has ever set foot on other shores. His tribe consists of seventeen men, one hundred and fifty women, and eighty children, all descendants of outlaws, malcontents, pirates and shipwrecked sailors. Not one of them has ever seen a horse, cow, *carabao*, goat, sheep or cat, although a few dogs exist on the island and wild pigs and fowl are plentiful.

Serpents are the curse of Babuyan Island, which was called by the Spaniards, *El Infierno Pequeno*—The Little Hell. They range from enormous pythons to short but deadly black cobras, and at dark when they commence to hunt food in the shape of great mountain rats the squealing of the rodents transforms the jungle into a pandemonium.

Up to 1923 no American vessel had ever dropped anchor off the shores of the island, the first being the *Apo*, the yacht of Governor-General Leonard Wood. Later, the Coast and Geodetic Survey cutter *Pathfinder* operated among the Babuyan and Batanes archipelagos, and word reached Manila that Japanese pearl pirates had been making illegal landings on Babuyan Island, committing atrocities on the defenseless inhabitants, forcing them to work without recompense, and cutting down and carrying away timber.

The Japanese government deplored such acts, but the situation was delicate, and to dispatch gunboats to patrol the coasts of American possessions could not be thought of. On the other hand, the Insular government of the Philippines had practically abolished its coast guard, and U.S. destroyers and gunboats were busy in Chinese waters. King Bernardo, a swaggering swordsman of the D'Artagnan type, told Captain O. W. Swainson, of the *Pathfinder*, of his attempts to resist the aggressions of the raiders, but these were futile, as his seventeen men were armed with bows, spears, and *bolos* while the Japanese bore firearms of the latest model.

In order that a formal complaint might

be made to the Japanese government, proof of illegal landings was necessary, and I, as a civilian special agent of the Military Intelligence of the Philippine Division of the U. S. Army, was detailed to secure it. And this is the way in which I became the first white man to live among the islanders of Babuyan.

History has but little to say of Babuyan Island. Dampier, a British navigator, visited it early in the eighteenth century and mentions the *babuys*, or wild pigs, from whence it takes its name. Dominican friars founded a mission there in 1716 but were forced to abandon it two years later because of malignant fevers which rose from the soil. During an eruption of Mount Bukis in 1851 a third of the island sank into the sea, leaving the remaining portion about sixteen miles in length by four in width. Practically the whole of the population perished at that time, but the jungle soon covered the scars, and outlaws and their families sought refuge there from the arm of Spanish justice.

I will endeavor to portray what the island has to offer for a well equipped exploring expedition.

First, the burial cairns, which I believe to be of very ancient Chinese origin, although there are graves of a much later date scattered about in which are found crude glass beads and copper ornaments.

These cairns are fifteen or sixteen in number. They are approximately twenty feet in height and forty in length and are composed of stone covered with a thick coating of concrete so hard as to defy anything except explosives. The largest, Rosales termed *Hari Matunda*—Old King—but even his ideas on the subject were mere conjectures.

What I call the Temple, Rosales terms the House of John. We may both be right—*quien sabe?* By mounting to a height of three hundred feet by means of terraces half covered with *cogon* grass a flat summit is reached. The terraces are composed of rows of red clay jars, each cemented on the top and inscribed with Chinese ideographs. In them repose bones and skulls carefully packed. The summit, probably forty feet square, is paved with flagstones and surrounded by a ruined wall of stone.

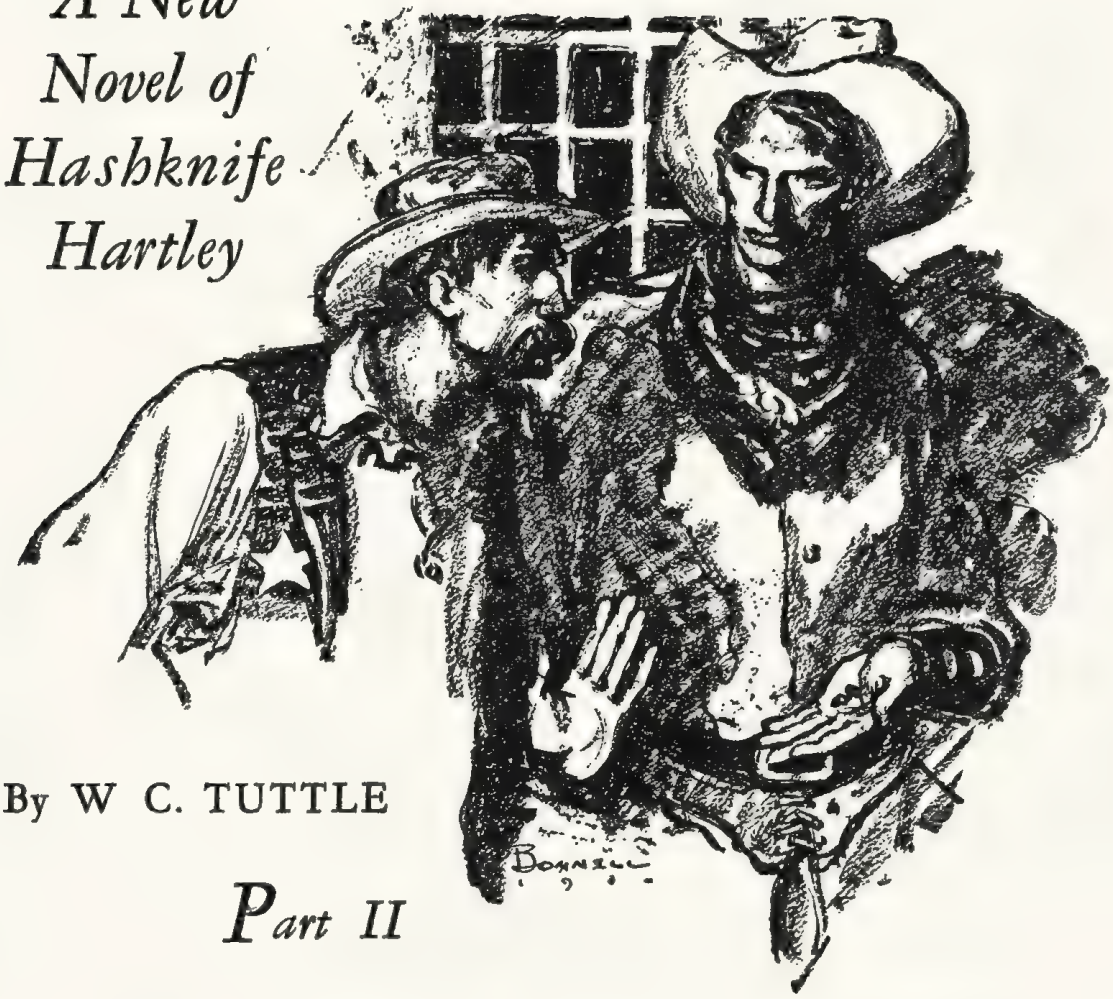
Rosales' story, obtained by him from a native called Malkum, who was a survivor of the 1851 eruption and who lived to be more than a hundred, runs that John was the captain of a pirate vessel wrecked on Babuyan in the latter part of the eighteenth century. He was the sole survivor of the ship's company but managed to reach the shore in company with a male and female mastif whose descendants were still on the island when Rosales arrived in 1906.

According to the legend the pirate espoused a native wife and speedily dominated the islanders because of his *malik mata*, or magic. He forced them to erect for him a house of stone on the temple site. Shipwrecks were frequent, and John, after looting the wrecks of their valuables, entertained any survivors in a lavish manner for a period of ten days. Then he poisoned them or set his dogs to worry them to death. A providential earthquake finally ended John's career by crushing him in the ruins of his house.

To back this story, Rosales showed me several cannon which the pirate had secured from wrecks and also a ship's bell. The former bore the date of 1771, and the bell, which is brass, is enscribed, *Lass of Bristol*, but bears no date. Does the House of John contain treasure? I wish I knew.

Poison Lake, its shores littered with bones of small animals who drank its brilliant blue waters, serpent haunted caves and wrecks near the rock ribbed coast of the island all hold a lure for the investigator; but reaching the place, and getting back, offers a real difficulty. I have seen piles of pearl button shell, relics of feasts, lying in the jungle in such quantity as would richly repay shipment, but no one seems interested in such things, and a poor newspaper man on a Havana sheet can never hope to secure the capital necessary for an expedition; and so I pass my information on.

A New Novel of Hashknife Hartley



By W C. TUTTLE

Part II

BULLET CRAZY

AFTER a poker game in the Trail End Saloon, in which Dick Rose was whipsawed out of a five thousand dollar mortgage on his Box E ranch by Harry Severn, professional gambler, and Steve Maxwell, owner of the X Lightning outfit, Maxwell was wounded by a bushwhacker, robbed of the unrecorded mortgage and three thousand dollars in cash.

Rose was unable to account for his whereabouts at the time of the shooting, but Maxwell refused to prefer charges on account of Rita, Dick's wife, with whom he was secretly in love. Rose then told Maxwell he would kill him if ever he dared to put foot on his ranch again.

At about this time Bart Evans got out of the penitentiary, where he had been sent upon conviction for various holdups. Bart swore he was not the famous Black Rider, and that the money he was seen counting in his bedroom by Ed Fields had come to him in the mail, without any clue to the identity of the sender. Fields was a rival of Bart for the hand of Norma Rose, Dick's pretty sister. Ed Fields used the money he got as reward for capturing the Black Rider to buy an

interest in Maxwell's X Lightning ranch.

Following Evans back to Trail City came Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens, on the trail of adventure. Hashknife had heard the story of the Black Rider from the old stage driver and, beguiled by the mystery, induced Sleepy to remain.

Evans could not understand Hashknife's interest in the case.

"Are you a detective, Hartley?" he asked.

Hashknife shook his head.

"I jist thought I might be able to help you," he said simply. "Prove you owned that fifty thousand dollars you were caught with."

Bart Evans leaned toward Hashknife suddenly.

"What the hell do you know about that fifty thousand dollars?" he barked.

"I KNOW it by name only." The tall cowboy smiled.

"Then how could you help me prove anythin'?"

Hashknife snapped away his cigaret, and with it went his lazy smile. He answered slowly:

"Evans, the fact that you were arrested for stealin' fifty thousand dollars means nothin' to me. If you came back here to dig up that missin' five thousand—all right. I don't want it. But if you stick to that story about you ownin' that fifty thousand dollars, you're either a damn' fool or an honest man, 'cause nobody but an honest man or a damn' fool would tell a story like that to a jury. I'm playin' that you're honest."

Evan got to his feet and walked the length of the little shack, his jaw shut tightly. Hashknife reached for the makings of a cigaret, paying no attention to Evans, who finally came back and sat down again.

"She's a funny world," he said wearily. "I'll have to tell you what I told that jury—and they didn't believe it. Probably you won't believe it either. The day before I was arrested, a package came by mail. It was just a plain package, done up in brown paper and well tied. Old Charley Rose, my best friend around here, picked it up at the postoffice and brought it out to me, because he wanted to see me about some matter. You see, out here we send away for quite a lot of stuff we use, and I thought it was somethin' I had sent for.

"I didn't open it until quite awhile after Charley Rose went away 'cause I wasn't home when he brought it; and in that package was fifty thousand dollars in currency. I tell you, I was weak when I counted it. It was all in tens, twenties, fifties and quite a few hundreds. Made a good sized package. I was sure there had been a mistake, but there was my name on the package.

"Well, I hid the money. I tell you, I was scared of the stuff. I wandered around all day tryin' to get my mind off the damn' stuff. It was sent to me, but still I couldn't see how it really could belong to me. The next day I took it out and put it on the bed, where I counted it again. That's when Ed Fields peeked through the window and saw me with it. I didn't hide it that time, except to wrap it up in a newspaper and put it in a little closet. They didn't have any trouble findin' it."

"No wonder the jury wouldn't believe it."

Hashknife smiled.

"I don't blame 'em myself. And here's another queer deal. Before they sent me over the road, I deeded my ranch, the Box E, to Charley Rose. He was my best friend in this country, and I'd trust him with my life. He was to take care of the place for me—own it, until I came back. I didn't want to sell it. My God, I worked hard to make a go of that place, Hartley.

"And, while I was in the penitentiary Charley Rose dropped dead from heart disease, leavin' no will, nothin' to show that he didn't own the Box E, and it went in as part of his estate. Dick Rose got it as his part of the inheritance. I came back to claim my ranch."

"It seems to me that Charley Rose brought you plenty grief, Evans."

"Not intentionally, Hartley. He was

the whitest man I ever knew. No, I won't say he was the whitest—but as white."

"You didn't know he was dead until you came back?"

"No, I didn't. I reckon Norma and Dick thought I was havin' it tough enough, as it was. They knew I loved the old man. I suppose it was jist as well to keep it from me. One sorrow was enough. I don't mean bein' in the pen. You see, when I was a little feller I was sort of adopted by an old prospector, named Mojave Ed Benteen.

"I don't remember my own folks. We wandered around the desert, and I went to school wherever we stayed long enough. About the time I was big enough to land a job, Mojave got married, and I pulled out for myself. He wasn't much of a letter writer, but we've kept in touch with each other. After I went to the pen—quite a while afterwards—I took a chance. The warden liked me, and I told him all about it; so my letter didn't wear the stamp of the prison. But it came back, marked deceased. I wrote another, takin' a chance that a mistake had been made, but it came back marked like the first one."

"How was he fixed financially?" asked Hashknife.

"Nothin'," sighed Evans. "About a year before I was arrested, I sent him a hundred dollars. He was close to eighty, crippled with rheumatism. His wife couldn't let him go prospectin'. They wanted to open a little restaurant at Needles, California, where they could manage to get along.

"After I got out, over two months ago, I wrote to the postmaster at Needles, askin' him about the old man, and he wrote me a short note, sayin' the old man died and was buried there. He didn't seem to know much about it, except that he had money enough for the funeral expenses. I asked about Mojave's wife, and the postmaster said he believed she died quite awhile before the old man did."

"Didn't Charley Rose remember givin' you that package?"

"Yeah, he remembered it—the package. But that didn't help any, because he didn't know what was in it."

"That's shore a queer deal," said Hashknife. "Don't make sense."

"That's what the jury thought—" dryly.

"What about this feller Maxwell gettin' shot and robbed?" asked Sleepy.

Bart laughed shortly.

"Dick Rose mortgaged the Box E to Maxwell for five thousand dollars, it seems. Dick is a born gambler, and the money burned his fingers; so Maxwell and Harry Severn, owner of the Trail End Saloon, got Dick between 'em in a poker game and they cleaned him.

"It seems that Maxwell and Severn split their winnings after Dick left, and on the way out to the X Lightnin', Maxwell was shot and robbed. He lost over three thousand dollars and the mortgage. Maxwell wasn't hurt so bad, except in his pocketbook. The mortgage wasn't recorded, and Dick refuses to sign a duplicate."

Hashknife laughed.

"It looks as though the gambler was the only winner. Did they arrest Dick Rose?"

"Brought him in to talk with Maxwell and the prosecutin' attorney, but Maxwell refused to prefer charges."

"Maxwell must be a philanthropic gent."

"I don't know Maxwell. He came in here after I left, and bought out the X Lightnin'. Ed Fields is his foreman."

"The man who peeked in your window?"

Bart's jaw tightened angrily as he nodded.

"What kind of a feller is the sheriff?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, Slim Tolson is all right. Takes life awful serious."

"Is he the fat one?" asked Sleepy.

"No, that's Honk Edwards, the deputy. Honk don't take anythin' serious. Most of the time he makes life miserable for Slim. This is their second term in office. I reckon Slim is worried about me. Anyway, he warned me to be careful. I suppose he sneaks up here in the evenin' to

see if I say my prayers, and who I mention. He'll watch both of you like a hawk. and if you think you're good at askin' questions, jist wait until Slim starts in on you."

IT WAS two days later when Bart Evans rode out to the Circle R Ranch. He had not seen Norma Rose since his first day in town, and he swore at himself for being foolish enough to go out there. He had long planned on at least selling the Box E for enough money to enable him to make a start on some other range, but fate had prevented that. No one in the valley would hire an ex-convict, especially one who was merely out on parole.

Len West met him with enthusiasm, and they stood down by the stable for quite awhile, talking things over. Norma came out on the porch to do some sewing, but did not notice the two men at the stable.

"You're goin' up to see her, ain't you?" asked Len.

"She might not care about it," replied Bart slowly.

"Norma ain't that kind, Bart. She's like the old man was. By golly, she can give Dick cards and spades and beat him runnin' a cow ranch. And she'd feel bad if she knowed you was out here and didn't come up to say howdy."

Bart sauntered up to the porch and Norma looked up with a smile.

"I didn't recognize you down there," she said.

Bart sat down on the steps and looked at her.

"Len says you're makin' a success of the ranch," he said.

"I suppose I am doing well enough, Bart. The boys work hard for me, and I've been lucky, I suppose."

"Luck is a wonderful thing," he said slowly.

"Bart," she said thoughtfully, "I've looked through all of dad's old papers and accounts since he died, and I can't find anything about the Box E. It had puzzled me quite a lot, and I wondered if you would tell me how much he paid you for the ranch."

"It don't make much difference, does it?"

She looked keenly at him for several moments and he turned away.

"What was the deal, Bart?"

"Well, I'll tell you what it was. After I was arrested, I had a talk with your dad. You see, there was a matter of five thousand dollars missin', and I didn't want 'em to take my ranch. Mebbe they couldn't have taken it, but I wasn't sure; so I deeded it over to your dad, him agreein' to keep it and take care of it until I got out, him to take a share of the profits for runnin' it."

Norma dropped her sewing.

"Bart! Do you mean dad didn't own it?"

"There ain't nothin' to prove he didn't. My word ain't any good, and—"

"Don't say that, Bart. Why, the estate was settled and Dick took—"

"I know all about that. Let it go."

"I'll not let it go. Dick wouldn't—

"No, Bart; right is right. If you say dad made that kind of a deal with you, I know he did."

"It's all right, Norma. Pshaw! It ain't worth worryin' about."

"Look at me, Bart Evans."

Bart turned slowly and looked at her.

"How much was your ranch worth?" she asked.

"What difference does—"

"I'll buy it from you."

"You'd—" Bart hesitated and smiled at her. "You know Dick would never give it up, Norma; so you'd buy it from me and never mention it to him."

"Well?"

Bart laughed shortly and got to his feet.

"I'm sorry it came up," he told her. "I wouldn't take your money. You can't buy that ranch."

"But it belongs to you, Bart."

He shook his head, a wistful smile in his eyes.

"No, I don't want it. The money it's worth won't make any difference either

way. There was a time when I wanted to make good, Norma; now it don't matter. Don't tell Dick. Let him go on knowin' he owns the Box E. I appreciate what you tried to do. It shore was square and white of you—but I can't accept."

He started down the steps, but she ran down and grasped him by the arm.

"What are you going to do?" she asked anxiously.

He looked at her and smiled slowly.

"I've quit plannin', Norma. I reckon I'll jist drift along."

"You will leave the valley?"

"I reckon I'm obliged to do that."

"Bart, listen to me; will you come and work for me—here on the ranch?"

He looked down at the hand on his arm, and softly put his other hand over it, squeezing tightly for a moment. But he did not look down at her face, as he gently shoved her aside and mounted his horse.

"Mebbe I'll see you sometime," he said huskily. "Anyway, I'll always remember you bein' awful white to me, Norma."

But he did not look at her, as he reined his horse around and rode away.

Norma stood on the porch and watched him disappear in the hills, and her eyes were full of tears as she turned to face old Chick Grush in the doorway. Old Chick rubbed his nose violently and cleared his throat.

"You quit that," he said. "Dang the luck, you—"

"He's gone away," said Norma thickly. "He hasn't any friends or anything."

"Now—now that's a danged lie," declared the old man. "He's got me and you and—and Len likes him too."

"Oh, I know that, but—Chick, you don't suppose he'd do anything foolish, do you?"

The old man rubbed his chin thoughtfully for several moments.

"Well—" slowly—"I'm his friend, and anythin' he does will be all right with me."

"That is real friendship, Chick."

"And damn' foolishness in lotsa cases."

BART EVANS rode back to Trail City in a very unsettled state of mind. He had only a few dollars left, and he realized that he would be foolish to stay in Trail City. To leave the State would be to break his parole.

"Out on my good behavior, busted flat and no job," he reflected bitterly. "Everybody in this country pointin' at me and sayin' there goes the Black Rider. Well, what's the use of fame without the game? There's one nice thing about the penitentiary—nobody can look down on you there."

He was in a bitter frame of mind when he rode into Trail City. He saw Ed Fields in front of the Trail End Saloon, and it required all his will power to keep him from going over there and starting trouble. Bart knew that Ed Fields wanted to marry Norma.

"Well, why not?" he asked himself, as he stabled his horse. "Fields may be a dirty, sneakin' coyote to me, but he's considered respectable by others. I'm no dog in a manger, but I'd like to take that five thousand dollars reward out of his mangy hide."

Hashknife and Sleepy had become acquainted with the sheriff and deputy. Bart Evans had been right when he said that Slim Tolson was the original question box. Hashknife was amused at Slim's efforts to find out all their past history.

"Don't pay any attention to him," advised Honk, when Hashknife mentioned it to the deputy. "Slim's thataway. 'S a wonder to me he ain't been killed for askin' questions. The thing to do is to lie to him. Build up a lotta lies and feed 'em to him. He'll believe 'em. I've knowed Slim for seven years and I ain't never quit lyin' to him yet."

Ed Fields strode up and Honk introduced them.

"Fields is foreman of the X Lightnin'," explained Honk.

"Half owner," corrected Fields, laughing.

"Yea-a-ah? When did that happen, Ed?"

"A few days ago."

"That's great. How's Maxwell's head?"

"All right."

"Oh, it was your pardner that got shot and robbed, eh?" said Hashknife.

Fields nodded shortly.

"Any idea who done it?"

"Sure. But Maxwell is kinda soft on the man's wife, and he refused to prosecute him."

"I wouldn't say that if I was you, Ed," said Honk Edwards.

"But it's true."

"Mebbe it's true that Maxwell is stuck on Dick Rose's wife, but it ain't never been proved that Dick bushwhacked Maxwell."

"I don't reckon it would be hard to prove it."

"Mebbe not—but I'd hate to make that statement and have Dick Rose hear about it."

"I'm not afraid of Dick Rose, Edwards."

"No, I know you ain't. Neither am I afraid of a rattler, but jist the same I don't take off m' boots and wade among 'em. And another thing, I'd go slow on makin' cracks about Maxwell and Dick's wife."

"What are you gettin' runty about?" asked Fields, just a bit nettled.

"I'm not runty about anythin', Ed, as long as you ask me. But Dick's wife is a damn' nice little woman, and I don't like your statements."

"I don't give a damn' what you like."

"All right; I spoke my piece. You keep on makin' open remarks about things you don't know much about and one of these days we'll have you laid out on a marble slab."

"Yeah? It seems to me yo're backin' Dick Rose in this deal."

"Well?"

Fields eyed the fat deputy for several moments. He knew the conversation had gone far enough for safety. These two strange cowboys were looking on in a nonchalant manner; the tall, gray eyed one apparently a bit amused.

"All right," said Fields indifferently, and he walked away.

"Hung it on to him, didn't I?" whispered Honk. "I used to think Fields had a lotta fightin' blood in him, but I reckon that smash Bart Evans handed him the other day knocked it all out."

"You didn't want to fight him, didja?" asked Hashknife.

"I should say I didn't! Me fight? I'm so shaky now I can't hardly talk. C'mon and I'll buy a drink."

Bart Evans did not show up around town that evening, and it was about nine o'clock when Hashknife and Sleepy walked over to his shack. There was no light in the shack, and no one answered their knock; so they went back to the hotel and went to bed.

"We ought to shake the dust of this place off our boots," said Sleepy, as he undressed. "I either want perfect peace or a hell of a lot of trouble, and this trouble around here is all petty stuff."

"Looks thataway," agreed Hashknife. "We won't stay long, pardner."

"Jist wastin' our talents around a place like this."

Hashknife smiled as he drew off his boots. Sleepy's speaking of their talents amused him. Hashknife did not consider himself talented. To himself he was just a cowboy getting along, broke most of the time. He and Sleepy Stevens had been bunkies for a good many years, wandering up and down the ranges where the cattle stray.

Henry—Hashknife—Hartley, wandering down to the Southwest ranges from northeastern Montana, landed a job at the ranch which gave him his nickname. There he met Dave Stevens, whom men called Sleepy, because no one had ever caught him napping, and together they had drifted away, because they were of the tribe that can not be still; always curious to know what was on the other side of the hill.

When they ran short of funds they would work a few months, getting together a few dollars; then they would drift on; always going some place and

never getting there. Hashknife had been blessed with a keen mind, the ability to solve range mysteries and the nerve to prove his solutions. At times they might accept a job with a cattle association, and several times they had done detective work for private parties; but neither of them rated themselves as man hunters.

Sleepy knew what was ahead of them when the old stage driver told of Bart Evans and the Black Rider. If Bart Evans had not come back, all would have been well, but Hashknife wanted to know *why* he came back. As far as Sleepy knew, Hashknife was no further along with his investigation than he was before they came to Trail City, but Sleepy also knew that Hashknife never told anybody what he had discovered.

And the tall, gray eyed Hashknife knew that Sleepy was just as keen to clear up a mystery as he was. Sleepy did not analyze anything. He was of no assistance in that respect; but Hashknife knew from past experience that Sleepy would be on the job when needed. Sleepy craved physical action. He could laugh aloud at the whine of a bullet. Fists or guns, it made no difference with Sleepy; he fought with a grin.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLACK RIDER

THE STAGE from Red Wolf arrived at Trail City about ten o'clock in the morning. A passenger train stopped there fifteen minutes before that time, which enabled the stage to pick up any passengers there might be for Southgate, fifteen miles south of Trail City.

Hashknife and Sleepy saw one passenger alight from the train the next morning, and a little later Honk Edwards said it was Frank Wallis, manager of the mines at Southgate. He was a medium sized, gray haired man, wearing glasses, carrying a suitcase. Honk explained that there were about a hundred men working in the mines down there, which were owned by one company, of which Wallis was manager.

Old Dunk Hardy was the driver, and the lone passenger sat on the seat with him. Hardy waved his whip at Hashknife and Sleepy as he drove past.

"Couple of new cowpunchers," explained Dunk.

"I thought so," replied Wallis.

"I met 'em in Red Wolf. They'd been workin' for the Cross-in-a-Box outfit. 'S a funny thing. Giddap! They came to town with Bart Evans."

"Bart Evans?" quickly. "Is he out of jail?"

"Yeah; paroled, they tell me."

"Paroled? Well, well! What is he doing back here, Dunk?"

"I dunno; he's just here."

"Hm-m-m-m. It's funny he'd come back here, isn't it?"

"Shore. Oh, I dunno, human bein's are funny things."

"Well, I suppose he's pretty well tamed by this time."

"I s'pose."

They drove along for about a mile in silence. The road dipped down through a dry wash, where the wheels whined in the deep sand and the four horses lugged heavily. Going out the other side was a steep pitch, the road narrowing to a one-way grade which wound around the point of a hill.

Suddenly the leaders shied violently and old Dunk jerked back on the lines. A man had stepped out past the leaders, covering the two men on the seat with a heavy revolver. The man was masked in black, and everything he wore was black, even to black gloves. Old Dunk swore softly, bitterly.

"Keep your hands up," warned the man hoarsely. "No foolin' now."

The leaders lurched ahead at the sound of his voice, and it might have been that Frank Wallis reached down quickly to grasp the side of the seat. Came the smashing report of the big revolver and Wallis sprawled off the seat, pitching out into the brush over the wheel.

"God!" exclaimed Dunk. "You killed him!"

"Serves him right," snapped the bandit. "Throw down the box."

"All right—" nervously. "But there ain't a thing in it."

"Who was that man?"

"Th-that's Frank Wallis, manager of the mines."

"Yeah? Where's his valise?"

Old Dunk reached back, picked up the valise and threw it down.

"Keep your hands up now."

Quickly the man drew out a sharp knife and slit the suitcase open. With his eyes on the stage driver, he quickly explored the suitcase. He grunted with evident satisfaction, and stuffed some packages into the bosom of his black shirt. Backing slowly away, he spoke warningly—

"Stay where you are for five minutes, or I'll kill you."

He backed to the brush where he quickly disappeared. His horse was just around the curve, tied inside a thicket, and as he mounted a buckboard drawn by a pair of buckskins, driven by Norma Rose, came past him. She saw him as he spurred his horse up a brushy draw, but he did not look back. She did not see the black mask, but she did see the man all dressed in black, riding a blue-roan.

In another moment the buckskin team halted sharply, almost running into the stage team. Old Dunk was starting to climb down over the wheel when he saw her.

"What's the matter?" she called to him.

He shook his head and pointed down into the brush. With her heart beating like a trip hammer, she quickly tied the buckskins to a snag on the side of the cut and walked around the edge past the lead team.

Old Dunk was there, trying to pull Frank Wallis' body out of the brush and back on to the grade.

"Wh-what happened?" asked Norma. The grizzled old driver looked at her and shook his head sadly.

"We got held up," he said simply, "and Wallis got killed, I reckon."

She knew Frank Wallis.

"You stay where you are," Dunk told her. "I'll git him out."

It was quite a task for the old man to drag that limp body back to the grade level and back along the edge to the open road behind the stage. It did not require medical knowledge to know that Frank Wallis was dead. Old Dunk drew the coat aside and looked at the bullet hole just above the shirt pocket on the left side.

The bandit had selected a good spot for the holdup; an almost impossible place for Dunk to back his stage to the dry wash for a turn, and it was probably two miles farther before he could make a complete turn. Dunk came back to Norma and studied the situation. She would be obliged to back her team a hundred yards along the narrow grade in order to allow the stage to get past.

'There's jist one way to do it," he told her. "I'll unhitch one of my leaders and ride him back to town for the sheriff."

"I'll stay here," she said.

It was but a few moments' work for him to unhitch, strip the harness from a leader, build a rope hackamore and climb on to the horse.

"I'll be right back," he called to Norma, and rode the horse over the edge of the grade, down through the brush and around to the dry wash, where he reached the road and went galloping back to Trail City.

Sleepy was standing in front of a store, talking with Fred Kohl and Ducky Teele, when old Dunk came galloping in, hatless, both arms working up and down like a two handled pump.

"Here comes Paul Revere," said Sleepy. "Ride 'm, grampaw!"

Old Dunk jerked up his horse in front of the sheriff's office, slid halfway to the animal's ears and dropped off heavily. Hashknife was in the office with Slim and Honk when the old man came stumbling in.

"Held up, b' God!" gasped the old man. "The Black Rider killed Frank Wallis! Don't stand there airin' your tonsils, Slim; git goin'!"

"The Black Rider?" asked Slim.

"Want me t' print it fer you?"

The boys in front of the store realized that something had gone wrong, so they hurried down to meet the men coming out of the office.

"Stage held up!" snapped Slim. "Man killed. Git your horses, boys."

There was a general rush for the livery stable and hitch-rack, and in a few minutes the seven men were galloping down the road. Old Dunk was too far behind to offer any more details, as his stage horse was not built for speed. They dismounted at the rear of the stage, and Norma joined them as Dunk rode up.

Hashknife made a quick examination of Wallis' body, while the sheriff questioned the old driver, who told in detail what had happened. No one bothered to introduce Hashknife and Sleepy to the girl, but they had heard so much about her they needed no explanation as to who she was.

"He pulled out thataway," said old Dunk, indicating the hill beyond the stage. "I dunno where he went from there."

"Didja see his horse?" asked Slim.

"Nope. He jist ducked in the brush, and I went down over the wheel to git holt of Wallis. I ain't more 'n over the wheel when Miss Rose shows up with her team."

Slim turned quickly to Norma.

"Did you see him?" asked Slim.

Norma started to speak, but changed her mind quickly. Hashknife was watching her closely, and it came to him in a flash that she had seen the man. But she said:

"No, I didn't see him, Slim. Why I—I nearly ran into the stage team."

"That's right," agreed Dunk. "She almost did run into my outfit."

"Well, mebbe we can pick up a track, but I doubt it. Can you handle your stage, Dunk—work past that buckboard, I mean?"

"If you can back that outfit to a turn-around, I can."

The posse loaded the body on the stage, wasted useful time in helping the two outfits to pass, and then made a search for the tracks of the bandit's horse. They found them in the little draw, followed over the top of the hog back, and lost them on a brushy mesa. Spreading out they rode steadily across the country, circling south of the Box E ranch, and swinging in at the foot of the higher hills east of the Box E and the X Lightning.

"Aw, it's no use," complained Slim, as they all came together for a consultation. "He had a long start on us. Jist like huntin' for a needle in a haystack. Let's go home."

They came past the X Lightning, where Kohl and Teele stopped. They saw Ed Fields going from the bunkhouse to the ranch-house, and he stopped to find out from Kohl and Teele the reasons for the posse. The rest of them went on back to Trail City, where they found plenty of chances to answer questions. Nearly every one knew Frank Wallis.

No one had seen Bart Evans around the town that day. After they stabled their horses, Hashknife and Slim went to Bart's shack. The door was closed, but not locked. His bed roll was still on the bed, but there was no evidences of any meal having been cooked that day.

Slim stopped and picked up an object from the floor. It was a little oval shaped piece of black cloth. Near it was another piece. Slim grunted with satisfaction.

"See what they are, Hartley?" he asked.

Hashknife nodded quickly.

"Looks like they might be the pieces of cloth cut in makin' eyeholes in a mask."

"That would cinch him, if nothin' else would."

"Looks bad," muttered Hashknife, as he searched the room carefully. He did not overlook anything or any place. Slim stood aside and watched him make

his search, wondering what the tall cowboy might be looking for.

Hashknife finished his search and came back to examine the pieces of cloth again.

"You better keep them in a safe place," he advised Slim.

"Shore, I'll keep 'em safe; they're evidence."

"Pretty good," admitted Hashknife.

Slim went to the depot, where he sent wires to the sheriffs of all the nearby counties, along with a description of Bart Evans.

Later he met Hashknife and told him what he had done.

"What do you suppose the Black Rider got from Wallis' suitcase?" he asked.

"He got the payroll of the mines at Southgate."

"Yeah? Well, does Wallis usually bring in the payroll that way?"

"I reckon he has for a long time."

"Does Bart Evans know Frank Wallis?"

"I reckon he does."

"You remember old Dunk sayin' that the bandit asked who Wallis was?"

"That's what makes it worse than ever for Bart. He stuck up the stage, knowing that tomorrow is payday at the mines, and you remember he asked Dunk to throw down the box. Mebbe he failed to recognize Wallis. Anyway, when Dunk told him who the man was, he got a hunch that Wallis was takin' the payroll in himself."

It was a plausible explanation, and Hashknife nodded in agreement.

"Oh, we've got Bart cinched—if we can catch him," said Slim.

"I guess you have. Bart shoots a .45, and you better have the doctor at Southgate recover that bullet. You'll hold an inquest tomorrow down there,won't you?"

"Tomorrow or next day; I ain't sure which."

When the stage came back that afternoon, Dunk said that Wallis had the payroll in that suitcase, and it was only a few dollars short of twenty thousand dollars, as another crew had been working for nearly a month, opening some new property.

"If Bart's got a hangout in the hills, look out for more holdups," prophesied Slim Tolson. "He's got plenty nerve, and he won't stop at one haul. And we can't starve him out, 'cause he's got friends. That's the hell of it."

"I like him," said Hashknife.

Late that afternoon Mrs. Dick Rose came to town with Dick Albans, the tall, gaunt faced, buck toothed cowboy, riding in a rickety buckboard. On the back of the equipage was a small trunk and a suitcase. She went to the Trail City hotel, and Fred carried her baggage up to the depot. Fields also came to town, seeking more information on the murder and robbery, and he met her in front of the hotel.

"You goin' on a trip?" he asked curiously.

"I am going to Cheyenne—going home," she replied evenly.

"Oh, yea-a-ah; goin' to visit the folks for awhile, eh?"

"But I'm not coming back."

Fields looked at her curiously.

"Well, that's different," he said slowly.

"Slightly."

She walked past him and went into the hotel. Fields scratched his head, grinned softly and went on.

Fred Albans came back, tied his team and went into the Trail End Saloon to get a drink. Albans was a cowboy of prodigious thirsts, which attacked him monthly, semi-monthly, and sometimes weekly. Chick Grush from the Circle R came in, worried over the possibility that Bart Evans had gone wrong again, and also thirsting for liquor. Ducky Teele, who had ridden in with Fields, joined them in the Trail End. And to make it a foursome, along came Honk Edwards, rather disgusted with his job. Honk was a good two handed drinker.

They had a round of drinks and then persuaded the bartender to issue a free one.

Ducky was a little cowboy, whose name fitted well, and who, strangely enough, aspired to sing bass. His favorite song was "Asleep In The Deep," sung

with variations and gestures. He tilted his hat over one eye and lifted his voice—

"Man-ee-e-e-e-e brave so-o-o-ouls are aslee-e-e-ep in the dee-e-e-ep, so-o-o-o-o—"

"Hell of a lot of 'em asleep in the shallers, too," interrupted Honk.

"Whatcha shay?" asked old Chick, mopping his bald head with the bar towel. "I didn't git that last, Honk."

"Gimme that towel," ordered the bartender. "Whatcha think that is—a head wiper? Use your handkerchief."

"Don't ride him," warned Albans. "Chick's m' friends, ain't you, Chick?"

"I s'pose so. Hell, I wasn't hurtin' your old towel."

"He wasn't, hones'ly," explained Albans. "Chick wouldn't hurt anythin', would you, Chick?"

"Much less a damn' ol' towel," agreed Chick. "Ain't he funny, Freddy? Now, I ask you, if he ain't funny. Be—be-grudg'n' me a dirty towel. Who's buyin'?"

"I'm buyin'," said Honk. They drank gravely.

"So-o-o-o-o be-e-eware, be-e-e-he-e-e-hee-e-e-e wa-a-a-are," rumbled Ducky.

"Didja ever try spirits of pep'mint?" asked Chick.

"What for?" asked Ducky.

"Pains in your stummick thataway. It's real good."

"He was singin'," confided Honk.

"No! The hell he was! I thought it was gas pains. Sounded like it. Well, let's have another, boys. Have one, bartender."

The bartender grabbed the towel away from Chick and threw it behind the bar, while he served them.

"That mus' be his pet towel." Albans laughed owlishly. "I'll betcha he's had it for years and years. Mebbe he's got it trained. Does it know any good tricks? No? Well, here's the firs' layer off your tonsils, gents."

"Here's to Bart Evans," said old Chick gravely. "Wher'ver he is, I wish him joy and shuckshess. And may the sheriff's office never git 'm."

"They won't," said Honk. "Not 'less somebody peeks in his winder."

Ed Fields came in, but not in time to hear Honk's remark. Fields could see there was no use asking Ducky to go back to the ranch; so he mounted his horse and headed for home. Later the quartet went to supper and came back to the saloon, where they demanded the latest news of the Black Rider.

"Still goin', eh?" Chick grinned.

"If he's ridin' that ol' blue-roan he won't git far," said Honk.

"You be shurprised what ol' horse'll do," said Chick gravely. "I had old shorrel horsh that went two hunner miles in one day. 'S a fact."

"That ain't pos'ble," declared Ducky. "Chick, I never called any man a damn' liar, until jist now."

"You mean to shay a ol' horsh went two hunner miles in one day?" asked Honk.

"Yessir—and never laid a hair."

"Mus' been damn' good road," said Albans.

"Bes' in the worl'," declared Chick. "Southern Pacific."

CHICK whooped with joy, tried to slam his fist down on the bar, missed it entirely and hit his chin on the edge of the bar. It nearly knocked him out. His smile faded as he clung to the bar with both hands, finally straightening up and looking them over seriously.

"Sh-show me the man who can't take a joke," he said dazedly," and I'll shoot his ves' buttons off, tha's what I'll do. Hittin' me on the chin thataway!"

"S'awful," agreed Honk seriously. "But you *will* take that towel."

Chick stared at the innocent bartender for several moments.

"Barten'er," he said softly," did you think I was reachin' for your damn' ol' towel ag'in?"

"Aw, you hit your own chin. I never touched you."

"I'll leave it to the boys if I did."

The boys all agreed that the bartender

had struck him without provocation, and advised the bartender to apologize, which he did, and set up the drinks again.

"I shuppose I ort to go home," said Albans thickly. "Poor ol' Dick is out there all 'lone. Gee, I'm shorry for poor boy."

"Whazzamatter with him?" asked Honk.

"His wife lef' him today."

"His wife lef' him?"

"Gone f'r good, lock, stock and bar'l. She's over in hotel. T'morrow she rattles her hocks for Cheyenne."

"Well, my Gawd, thish mus' be invesshigated," said Honk. "Things like that mus' not be."

"Never in the worl'," agreed Ducky. "Oh, never in the worl'."

"What sheems to be her great'st trouble?" asked old Chick, blinking ponderously.

"Quarrelin'," replied Albans. "Quarrelin' with Dick."

"What 'bout?"

"Oh, 'bout shootin' Maxwell and takin' all his money."

"Whazzamatter?" asked Honk. "Didn' he split it with her?"

"I never thought of that," admitted Albans. "Mebbe tha's it."

"Shore," said Honk. "Tha's sholution."

"You got lossa brains," said Chick. "Oh, jus' lossa brains—so's a calf. A—a woman ain't shatisfied with fif'-fif'y split, Honk. My the'ry is that she wanted it all."

"You been married, ain'tcha?" asked Ducky.

"Three times," admitted Chick. "I know wimmin!"

"You knowed three wimmin'," corrected Honk. "Solomon was the only man who knowed wimmin'. He had a thousand wives."

"Jist like Mexican army," said Ducky. "Thousand ginerals and one private. What'll you have?"

"But wha's to be done 'bout Dick and his wife?" queried Honk.

"The ques'n is thish," said Chick wisely. "Does he want her back?"

"Tha's ques'n," replied Albans. "He had tears in his eyes when she lef', but I dunno if he glad or shad."

"He's glad," said Chick with great conviction. "I know how he feels, y'betcha. I 'member how I felt when Whisp'rin' Wind went—"

"Whazza name?" interrupted Honk gravely.

"Whisp'rin' Wind. Her paw was a C'manche chief, and she—"

"My Gawd!" gasped Ducky. "You don' mean to shay that a Injun lef' you. Chick, you mus' have been 'n awful brute."

Chick nodded and began crying softly to himself.

"Aw, shut up," wailed Ducky. "I didn't mean t' hurt your feelin's. I'll tell you what le's do; le's take a bottle and go out to shee Dick. If he's shad, we'll cheer 'm up, and if he's happy, we'll help shelebrate with him."

"Tha's great idea," applauded Honk. "Barten'er, give us couple bottles of verol' whishky."

"Five," corrected Albans. "You make me tired, Honk. Anybody'd think you was goin' church."

They made their purchases, staggered out to the Box E buckboard, where Chick and Ducky piled into the back, with Albans and Honk on the seat. Fred forgot to untie the horse, but fortunately the rope snapped and they headed for the ranch, yelping at the moon.

It was a wild ride, in which luck played a leading part. Around curves on two wheels, missing the road entirely at times and tearing through brush, bounding high out of narrow washes, but managing to stay right side up.

And then they were at the Box E, galloping in the darkness through a gate, when the hub of the right front wheel caught a post; and the team skidded to a stop against the stable, dragging the buckboard on its left side, the occupants stretched out across the yard. The team was willing to stay where it was.

It was very dark out there, and not a light was showing in the ranch-house.

"We went shome, didn't we?" inquired Ducky's voice.

"Tha's my version," agreed old Chick, staggering around in the darkness, partly sobered by his fall. "Where's ever'body?"

"Wha's goin' on round here?" asked Fred Alban's voice querulously.

"You ort to know—you unloaded us," grunted Ducky. "Where's Honk?"

"Here's Honk," replied Chick. "Betcha he's hurt. Yessir, there's blood on him. Hey! Honk's hurt! Mebbe he's dead."

It was too dark for them to see anything, but Honk seemed dead. They pawed him over.

"Gittin' stiff already," declared Ducky. "Where's that rig? Gitta rig, quick. Fin' that team, Fred; we've gotta git Honk to a doctor."

"Tha's right. I'll find 'im."

Chuck and Fred found the team, and with great difficulty managed to put the buckboard on its wheels again. As far as they were able to determine, the outfit was all right. Perhaps one wheel was a bit bowed, but it would turn. They loaded Honk into the rear and Chick held him in while the other two squeezed together in the seat.

They each had a big drink from a bottle and headed for town.

THE ACCIDENT had sobered them to a great extent; the team was dogged from their long run; so the return trip was accomplished without incident or accident. They drove up to the front of the Trail End Saloon, just as Slim Tolson, Hashknife and Sleepy came out.

"Better git a doctor," said Fred Albans. "We had a accident, and mebbe Honk is killed. It was too dark for us to find out for sure."

"F'r God's sake!" snorted the sheriff, as he fairly lifted old Chick from where he was wedged in beside the body in the back of the buckboard.

Ducky and Fred got out, and with the assistance of others they lifted out the injured or dead man and carried him into the saloon.

"He-e-ey!" snorted the sheriff, getting his first look at the man.

Ducky sat down heavily in a chair while the rest crowded around and looked down at the face of Steve Maxwell.

"Wh-where's Honk?" wondered Chick blankly.

"This man has been shot," said Hashknife.

"Dead?" asked Harry Severn, the gambler owner of the place.

"As dead as he ever will be," replied Hashknife.

"Better get a doctor," muttered the sheriff.

"If he's the coroner," said Hashknife. "A doctor won't do him any good."

" 'S damn' funny," wailed old Chick. "Steve Maxwell wasn't with us, was he, Ducky?"

"He wasn't," agreed Ducky. "At least he wasn't when we started. But where's Honk?"

"Tell me what happened," said the sheriff. "You tell it Ducky—you're about the soberest of the gang."

Ducky told him what happened, as nearly as he could remember.

"And you found the body between the gate and the stable?"

Ducky nodded.

"Must have been, Slim."

"And no sign of Dick Rose?"

"We didn't see him, and the house was dark."

The sheriff nodded slowly.

"You fellers load that body into the buckboard and take it down to Doc Shell's place."

He turned to Hashknife.

"Want to take a ride with me?"

"Shore."

As they stepped out on the saloon porch Dick Rose rode up, slid off his horse and stepped upon the porch. Dick's face looked gray and drawn in the yellow light from the windows. The sheriff acted quickly. Stepping in close to Dick, he deftly removed his gun from its holster. Dick jerked back, his hand flashing back to the empty container.

"What's the matter with you, Slim?" he asked hoarsely.

"Jist playin' safe."

"But—" Dick cut short his protest when the men came out, carrying the body.

"C'mon down to my office," ordered the sheriff, and Dick turned without any comment. Hashknife went down with them, and the sheriff locked the front door.

Dick sat down wearily, his eyes watching the sheriff with curiosity.

"Where have you been, Dick?" he asked.

"Where have I been? What difference does that make?"

"Quite a lot."

"I don't see— What's the matter, anyway?"

"How long since you left home?"

"I dunno. Never looked at the clock when I left."

"Where have you been?"

"You asked me that before."

"Yeah, and you didn't answer it."

"Don't know why I should answer it. That's *my* business, Slim."

"What was the trouble between you and Steve Maxwell?"

Dick's lips assumed a grim angle, but he did not answer the question.

"You declared a deadline against Steve Maxwell, didn't you?"

"What if I did?"

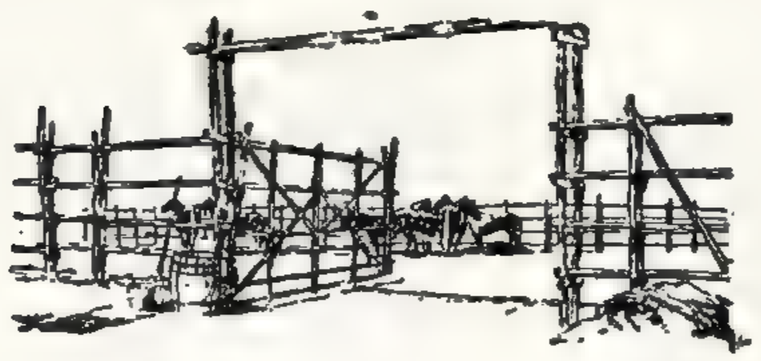
"Makes it bad for you, Dick; Maxwell is dead."

"Dead?" Dick shifted his position and sat up straight. "What killed him?"

"A bullet."

"Oh! Well, what has that got to do with me?"

"He was found between your front gate and the stable—"



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By DAVID MASTERS

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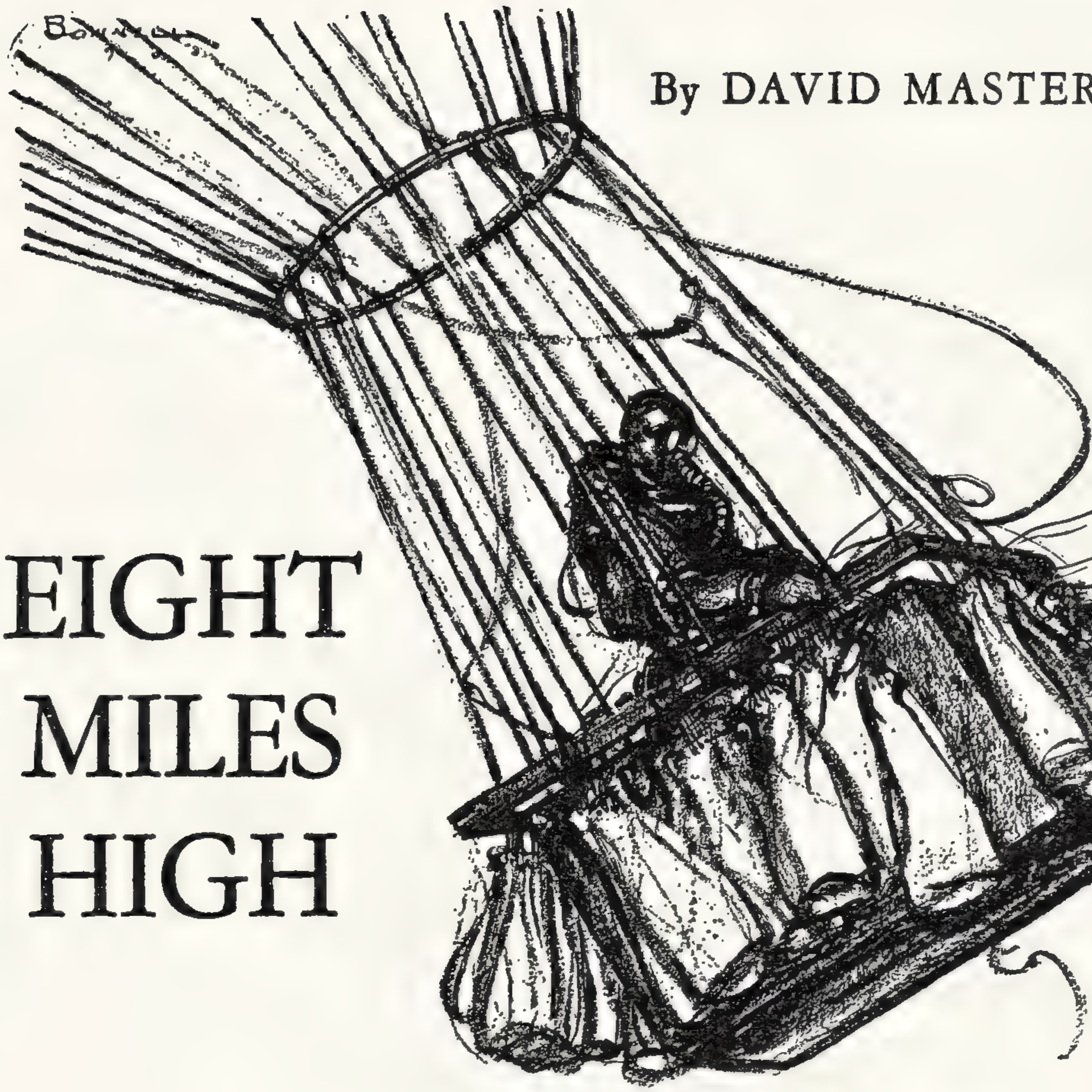


A thrilling account of the balloon ascents of Captain Hawthorne C. Gray, who twice flew higher than man had ever been before, and paid for his indomitable courage with his life.

ONE man, since the world began, has risen to a height of eight miles in the air and lived to tell the tale. That man was Captain Hawthorne C. Gray, of the United States Army Air Corps, whose balloon ascents for the sake of science place him in the very forefront of the pioneers of the upper atmosphere.

While oceanographers are plumbing the depths of the ocean to learn about the conditions that exist miles beneath the surface of the sea, meteorologists are daily sending up their little balloons in order to find out more about the mighty atmospheric ocean at the bottom of which we live and move. Some of these balloons reach astounding heights. One even touched 72,000 feet, or over thirteen miles. When found, they naturally provide a good deal of information to those who are studying the currents of the air.

Now Captain Gray, keenly interested

as he was in air currents, was even more wrapped up in the problem of the effect produced upon the human body by the reduced pressure of the higher altitudes. And the only way of finding out what happened was to go as high as possible, and see for himself.

Only those who have been subject to sudden variations in pressure can realize what air pressure means. All human beings at sea level are under a pressure of about fifteen pounds to the square inch, a pressure that would squash us all flat if Nature did not neutralize the risk by making the pressure inside our bodies equalize that of the atmosphere. So the pressures balance, and nobody except a few scientists ever remember that they exist at all.

I have personally ascended a mile or two in the heavens, and to go to the other extreme I have walked about the seabed in diving kit; but it was not until I was subjected rather quickly to an increase in air pressure some ten pounds to the square inch higher than atmospheric pressure, that I realized its force. That was an agonizing moment. My skull felt as though it were fitted into a close cap that was being screwed tighter and tighter, until I momentarily expected it to be crushed to pulp, just like a lemon in a lemon squeezer. Luckily I did the right thing, and all was well.

If this happens when pressure is increased—and more than one diver has been accidentally crushed to jelly by sea pressure—what happens when it is reduced? The experience of Major Schroeder in striving to fly to 40,000 feet in an airplane is rather illuminating. At 36,000 feet his oxygen gave out, he lost consciousness and fell six miles with his machine in three minutes. So rapid was the drop that his steel petrol tanks were smashed in by the weight of the denser air pressing on their outsides. And when the airman himself was picked up, his heart, according to the remark to me of one of the officers who lifted him from his machine, "was about the size of a football, and you could see it pounding like mad through his thick flying kit."

And I recollect Dr. Somervell telling me after his gallant failure to climb Mount Everest, when he attained to over 27,000 feet, that in the effort to obtain enough oxygen to keep the body going in that rare atmosphere, with its light pressure, he was breathing, or rather panting, as fast as sixteen times for every step he took. So affected were the mental powers that it was difficult to think at all, and it was a mystery to him how on earth he managed to remember to point his camera toward the highest point at the peak of his climb and press the shutter. He told me that the effort required to do this simple thing was far greater than any one can understand. He took a photograph toward the summit, but he has not the slightest recollection of doing so.

Profoundly curious about these problems, Captain Gray determined to do his best to throw a little more light on them. Accordingly, on March 9, 1927, he stepped into his balloon and floated upward. In forty-six minutes he had reached a height of about five miles and a half, or 28,510 feet—nearly as high as Mount Everest. Owing to the difference in the pressure, he lost consciousness, and for twenty minutes the balloon was floating over five miles high with the insensible man aboard. Then it started to drop, and by the time it had come down to 12,000 feet, or roughly two miles, the aeronaut regained consciousness, after being in a dead faint for fifty minutes. In less than two hours from the time he started he was down to earth again.

Although in that time he had exceeded the American ballooning record by 13,000 feet, he had fallen short of the world's record by over 7,000 feet. No doubt he would have liked to gain the record for his country. But his mind was more concerned with the temperatures to be met with at the higher levels, the direction and force of the air currents, the effect that the reduced pressure had upon physical effort.

HE PUT in hand his preparations for another flight, and a couple of months later, on May 7, 1927, he stepped into the basket of his balloon, took a final look round, donned his mask and gave the order to let go. The earth dropped away and he shot steadily upward at a rapid and regular rate. In half an hour the earth was 20,000 feet below him, and in an hour he had passed the 40,000 foot mark. Like the good balloonist he was, he had been methodically dropping his ballast to keep the balloon moving upward without wasting time, and in another five minutes he attained the highest point above the earth's surface ever reached by a human being.

For a brief minute or two his balloon, with all the ballast gone and his oxygen cylinders dumped overboard, floated at an altitude of 42,470 feet, as is proved by his barograph records. The difficulty of pulling his ripcord in that rarefied atmosphere was extremely great. It required on his part something of a superhuman effort to move a finger. His heart, in spite of the pure oxygen he was breathing, was pumping at a rate that would have terrified medical men. It was racing, owing to the reduced pressure, just as a liner's propeller races when it is out of the water.

He had the good sense, and found the strength, to valve his balloon to let some of the gas out, in order to drop as quickly as possible to a lower altitude and a higher pressure. In five minutes he dropped 7,000 feet, and his rate of descent increased in the next four minutes to 10,000 feet, or nearly two miles.

Down plunged the balloon, with the aeronaut beginning to strive to check the speed of the descent. His ballast was used long ago, the earth was rushing up to him at an unpleasant velocity. As the minutes passed and the downward rush continued, it became plain to him that if the balloon hit the earth at the pace at which it was falling he would certainly be smashed to pieces.

He had attained almost the extreme height, according to theory, to which a human being could ascend and continue to live; he had broken all altitude records for balloons and aeroplanes; but he knew very well that before his wonderful record could be accepted it was essential for him to land in his balloon with his instruments beside him. The temptation to stick to the balloon and hope for the best must therefore have been very great, for no man after attaining such an objective would lightly cast away the opportunity of having the official seal placed upon his achievement.

He valved the balloon again, hoping that the rate of descent would force the neck up into the gas bag and make the envelop act as a parachute. Unfortunately the balloon failed to act as he desired.

In twenty-five minutes he had dropped 32,000 feet to an altitude of 10,000 feet. He was no mere seeker after records, but a scientist who, if he remained alive, might add a little to human knowledge. If he continued in the balloon, he might reckon on living another five or six minutes, judging by the rate at which he was falling.

He did not hesitate. Upon his back was packed a parachute. Seeing that it was in order, he clambered on the ledge of the basket, pulled the valve of the balloon wide open, tied it and then jumped.

So quickly was the balloon falling that there seemed a perceptible time before they parted company. For a brief moment it loomed over him, then he drew away.

He was carefully helmeted against the bitter cold, yet he could hear the wind whistling past his ears. The extra pressure of the air against his body as he dropped grew stronger. The balloon, relieved of his weight, ceased to fall so rapidly. He hurtled downward and the distance between him and his craft increased.

A fierce jerk on a ring at his breast, and something most miraculously seemed to reach out of the sky, grasping him under

the armpits and slowing up his dizzy fall. It was his parachute opening.

He hung suspended in the heavens while his balloon crashed earthward. So, slowly revolving and swinging to and fro something like a pendulum, he saw the earth rising to meet him. The tips of his toes touched the ground and scraped along. He fell to his knees, and the parachute that had saved him from death tumbled about him like the shroud he had so narrowly escaped.

No man with a cool and calculating mind, the mind of a scientist, could launch himself from a falling balloon, as Captain Gray did, without being cognizant of the grave risks he ran. However perfectly things appear to be functioning, there is always the chance that something may go wrong; that instead of the parachute opening, a trifling mishap may prevent it; and the man who thinks, by jumping, to seize his sole opportunity of surviving, is making certain of death.

Whatever may have been Captain Gray's feelings at the moment when he launched himself from the balloon at a height of 7,000 feet, he refrained from commenting on them. In his report he simply stated that he jumped and landed safely and left those with intelligence to read the thrilling human story between the lines.

After two such experiences, most men would have been contented to rest on their laurels and leave further researches to others. But Captain Gray had no fear. Very carefully he considered all that he had learned from the flight. For the first time he realized how extremely difficult it is for a man to make any physical movement at all at such high altitudes. With the atmospheric pressure so reduced, it is as though a man used to wearing a tightly buckled belt were suddenly robbed of its support, and there is the risk of the organs of the body rupturing through lack of pressure to keep them in their place. Without the necessary pressure or force to maintain a proper circulation of the blood, unconsciousness and death must ensue.

BEARING in mind all the knowledge he had gained from his recent experiences, he began to plan another flight—to carry him as high as a balloon with a man aboard could possibly ascend in the earth's atmosphere. Seeking to reduce physical movements to an absolute minimum, and having discovered the difficulty of tipping up a bag of sand when nearing the peak of his ascent, he arranged his sandbags containing the ballast with the mouths pointing downward, the ends being folded up and skewered with a pin running through eyelet holes. A cord was attached to the end of each pin; therefore all he had to do to let out the sand was to raise his hand and pull the cord, whereas tipping up a sandbag at the highest altitude might become an absolute impossibility.

Then he arranged to take three cylinders of oxygen, each containing two hundred cubic feet of life giving gas, and each fitted with a parachute to send it safely to earth. If such a cylinder were dropped without a parachute and it struck a house, it might easily kill several people; hence the precaution.

As the cylinder was released, the balloon, relieved of its weight, would naturally rise higher, consequently cutting adrift a cylinder would be akin to throwing out ballast. When each was used, it was only necessary to turn a tap to disconnect it from its fellow, and then cut a small rubber pipe. Here again the operations were reduced to the simplest movements, the cylinders being arranged outside the basket to make it unnecessary to lift them.

Very cleverly a small heating chamber was fitted in which the outer air combined with the oxygen, so that the aeronaut did not run the risk of breathing air that was forty-four degrees below zero. I need not point out that if a man sitting still were driven to breathe such cold air, and if there were no artificial means of warming his body, he would quickly be frozen to death.

Captain Gray, of course, had a suit

which was heated by electricity. In order to insure that his goggles were not covered with ice, owing to the moisture of his body condensing on them and freezing, they also were heated; and there was a special guard made of felt fitted to an ingenious valve through which he breathed to prevent ice and frost from forming about his nose and mouth.

The amount of oxygen to mix with the ordinary air was automatically regulated to sustain life. A pressure valve gradually cut off the flow of outer air as he rose, and the higher the altitude the greater became the supply of oxygen, until at the highest limits, he was breathing oxygen straight from the cylinder. All these things were arrived at after the most careful tests, during which he measured the volume of air he inhaled at each breath; thus he was able to calculate to a minute how long his supply of oxygen would last, and how long it would be safe for him to remain at the peak of his climb before he came down.

All sorts of experiments were carried on with insects and birds and animals, to see what happened to them at great heights. For this purpose a chamber was used in which the the atmospheric pressure could be reduced to conform with the pressure met at any desired altitude. It was found that the low pressures from 25,000 to 28,000 feet robbed all animals of consciousness.

Incidentally these experiments indicate what a tremendous strain Somervell and his colleagues underwent in climbing without oxygen to 27,000 feet up Mount Everest. They actually climbed and made physical movements when the atmospheric pressure was almost too low to sustain life—a wonderful instance of the triumph of mind over matter.

It may be recalled that in the epic balloon ascent of Glaisher, in 1862, the aeronaut lost consciousness at 29,000 feet, while his assistant, Coxwell, was clinging to the balloon ring trying to disentangle a rope that had got twisted owing to the continual spinning motion of the balloon as it shot upward to a height of five miles in forty-six minutes. Coxwell's hands became frozen owing to the intense cold before he was able to drop down from the ring into the basket. Speaking to Glaisher and getting no reply, Coxwell learned that he was unconscious.

Glaisher's account of how his sight began to fail, and how he lost control of his muscles, is thrilling in its simplicity. He looked at the barometer, which indicated 29,000 feet:

"I laid my arm upon the table possessed of its full vigor and, on being desirous of using it, I found it was powerless. I tried to move the other arm and found it powerless also. I then tried to shake myself and succeeded in shaking my body. I seemed to have no limbs. I then looked at the barometer and while doing so my head fell on my left shoulder. I struggled and shook my body again, but could not move my arms. I got my head upright, but for an instant only, when it fell on my right shoulder; and then I fell backward, my back resting against the back of the car, and my head on its edge. In this position my eyes were directed toward Mr. Coxwell in the ring. When I shook my body I seemed to have full power over the muscles of the back, and considerable power over those of the neck, but none over either my arms or legs; in fact, I seemed to have no arms or legs. As in the case of the arms, all muscular power was lost in an instant from my back and neck. I dimly saw Mr. Coxwell in the ring and endeavored to speak, but could not; and in another instant intense black darkness came; the optic nerve finally lost power suddenly. I was still conscious, with as active a brain as at the present moment while writing this. I thought I had been seized with asphyxia, and that I should experience no more, as death would come unless we speedily descended; other thoughts were actively entering my mind when I suddenly became unconscious as on going to sleep."

Feeling himself going off, too, Coxwell, utterly unable to use his hands, managed to seize the cord of the valve in his teeth. Letting his head drop forward two or

three times, he thus succeeded in pulling the valve open and allowing some of the gas to escape, which sent the balloon down three miles in nine minutes, so saving their lives.

THAT moment when Captain Gray found his balloon would not act as a parachute and he was driven to jump from it to save his life, must have made a deep impression on his mind, albeit he said little about it. Not again would he be placed in such a dilemma with death so near. This time he fitted a cord which led from the ring of the appendix up to the valve controlling the gas, where it ran over a pulley and down to a small windlass in the basket. Little strength was required to turn the handle of the windlass and pull the neck of the balloon up to the valve, thus transforming it into a gigantic parachute. Captain Gray, with his past experience to go on, made sure it was well within his power to do what was necessary.

In temperatures of fifty or more degrees below zero, everything liquid will solidify, grease and oil being no exception. Bearing this point in mind, and to insure that the scientific instruments would give a true record and would not stop owing to oil freezing, all the automatic and clockwork instruments were taken to a jeweler who scientifically cleansed every spot of grease and oil from every part of them.

When the two barographs and the thermograph to record the altitude and temperature were brought back, the levers were sealed in the working position to prove that they were not disturbed by human agency during the flight. In addition, there was of course a thermometer and an altimeter; while in order to find out the greatest height at which it was possible to hear wireless messages and music, a receiving set with batteries and headphones was carried, the wireless waves being caught by wires trailing from the basket.

All the equipment was tested and tested again. And when Captain Gray had assured himself that everything was as it should be, the most carefully thought out scientific equipment that had ever been assembled for a balloon ascent, he checked it once more just to be on the safe side. He was determined to leave nothing to chance.

On the afternoon of November 4, 1927, the balloon was straining at its moorings when he donned his electrically heated flying suit, completely enclosed his head in the helmet, pulled on his frost defying gauntlets and got into the car. All was bustle at the Army Air Corps depot on Scott Field, Illinois. The engines of several airplanes were roaring on the ground. Just after two o'clock they began to take off to gain altitude before the balloon left the earth.

Giving a final look round to make sure that everything was in place, Captain Gray glanced at the clock aboard, noted the time was 2:23, and gave the signal to let go.

With a farewell wave of the arm to those on earth, he rose into the air and soared upward, traveling south at a rapid rate. The airplanes acting as his escort were climbing, too, but he soon mounted above them, and although they did their best to keep him in view they were unable to do so. At ten minutes past three he found himself among heavy clouds, which completely obscured him from the sight of his airplane escort. At one moment a pilot sighted the balloon, the next instant a cloud slipped in front of it, and Captain Gray, keen to further the interests of science, full of vitality, vanished from the ken of humanity into the higher atmosphere at a speed of over a hundred miles an hour.

Brilliant work on the part of Captain H. H. Fisher, Captain J. G. Byran and Lieutenant E. J. Bowling, work which was fully tested and proved by scientific experiments and borne out by Captain Gray's log, was needed to elucidate the mystery of what happened afterwards.

Fast as Captain Gray rose into the air, his ascent was slower than on former

flights. The first time he touched 28,000 feet in forty-five minutes, which would be about the same rate at which Glaisher ascended on his record flight nearly three-quarters of a century previously, the latter reaching five miles, or 26,400 feet, in forty-six minutes. On Captain Gray's second trip he registered 28,000 feet in under forty minutes, and in sixty-five minutes arrived at the highest level ever attained by man—42,470 feet.

On the third ascent it was an hour before he passed the five mile mark, and two hours before he swung suspended eight miles above the earth at 42,470 feet. Thus time was lost all the way, and the life of the aeronaut depended upon a rigid time table. A time table in turn depends upon a clock. It is impossible to keep time, where the difference between life and death may be a matter of minutes, if there is no clock to go by.

All the way up, Captain Gray was fully occupied in recording his impressions. To make even short notes takes time, therefore it seems certain that he did not wish to rise so rapidly, but was anxious to take a little longer to observe and record the things that mattered.

There was no assistant to attend to the various duties of controlling the craft, and those who tune in to the wireless every night know how many minutes may be wasted before perfect reception is obtained. At 12,000 feet, while listening to the wireless, he found the reduced pressure was already beginning to tell on him, for he writes in his log, "Symptoms of rickets," which indicates that his legs were affected; consequently he turned on the oxygen apparatus.

By 2:50 he had risen to 15,000 feet, and the cold was freezing the moisture on his goggles, so he turned on the electrical heater to four volts in order to warm the air he was breathing and clear his glasses. By 3:05 he had reached the 19,000 foot mark and the temperature had fallen to zero. He noted the facts in his log, to the sound of a saxophone over the wireless.

HIS EYES were continually on his instruments to see that he was climbing steadily, and when the rate of climb slackened he jettisoned some sand from his ballast bags. Maybe the thought crossed his mind that he was rising too slowly, for he must now have pulled the skewer from one of the bags to let it run away more quickly than those emptied formerly. This is indicated by the fact that he climbed 4,000 feet in the next five minutes, the rate of climb being accelerated by nearly two hundred feet a minute.

Snow began to fall about him, and the temperature dropped to eight degrees below zero. He mentioned it briefly in his log, still listening to the wireless music which came clearly to his ears.

Three minutes more saw him 1,000 feet higher, with snow still falling and the wireless functioning perfectly. Again he withdrew a skewer from a sandbag and let the sand drop through the snowstorm to earth. It sent the balloon up 3,000 feet in a couple of minutes to 27,000 feet, with a temperature of fifty-eight degrees of frost, or twenty-five degrees below zero, a jazz band miles below him and hundreds of miles away playing "Just another day wasted away—"

Onward and upward he traveled with the temperature dropping steadily while a voice in the ether explained how leaves could be dyed and gilded. Two minutes carried him 2,000 feet higher with a temperature four degrees lower. The time he noted was 3:17 and the altitude 29,000 feet.

He let out more sand and turned the disk of his wireless set until he caught the station at Chicago quite clearly playing "The Pied Piper." His barograph indicated 30,000 feet and the temperature was down to thirty-five degrees below zero.

He glanced at the clock. It still said 3:17.

Surely it was wrong—it must be wrong! He had risen 3,000 feet since he looked last. A balloon could not rise 3,000 feet in no time at all.

Instantly he realized that the clock was frozen. After his note on the altitude he wrote just two words:—

"Clock frozen."

He was feeling queer. His legs had early been affected. Now he seemed to have less control of his hands. He found it needed an effort to make his fingers do what his brain dictated; and his writing was becoming shaky and unlike that at the beginning of the log.

Once more his fingers manipulated the wireless receiver. He picked up another station and listened to a march. His pencil noted the station, the word "march" and the temperature, thirty-two, which had risen two degrees.

At 34,000 feet he finished his first cylinder of oxygen. Turning off the tap, he disconnected the first cylinder and turned on the second. Then he forced his hand to pick up the knife and cut the rubber pipe and lashings of the empty cylinder. As it dropped, the wireless suddenly ceased. Peering over the side, the aeronaut saw that the receiver wires had been torn away by the cylinder as it fell.

Picking up his pencil—for ink would have been as solid as iron in that temperature—he wrote—

"Cyl off broke antenna no more music."

A little later he touched the lowest temperature recorded on the flight. It was seventy-two degrees of frost, or forty below zero; yet, thanks to science, which was heating his suit and the air he breathed and keeping his goggles free of ice by electricity, he was able to sit still without being instantly frozen to death. Here was a miracle, if ever there was one.

Now the temperature began to rise. He found it getting too hot for him, so he switched off from four volts to two volts. He notes in shaky writing that it is getting warmer—it was eight degrees hotter at 36,000 feet.

Who can tell what were his thoughts? He must have been grappling with the effects of the low pressure. His mind was still functioning, but I should imagine that his actions were becoming more subconscious than conscious.

From the last entry but one in his log we may infer that he was fighting to retain control of his faculties, mental and physical. "Hair," he wrote, and then followed it with "air? ? ?" just as a man would who was semi-conscious or half dreaming. Thus his entry goes: "Hair (Air? ? ?) pulling out belly vacuum in mouth, 39,000 ft.—28".

What did it mean? Did his note indicate that the low pressure was changing the shape of his balloon, making the sides bulge out and creating a depression in the appendix or mouth? Or was he referring to the physical effects on himself? It is impossible to say definitely. Who knows but at that moment he felt as though he were going to burst, that the reduced pressure of the atmosphere gave him the impression that something was trying to drag his internal organs out of his mouth, that there was a strange, horrid vacuum, which he noted to enlarge on when he returned to earth.

UP ROSE the balloon another 1,000 feet. He was now at 40,000 feet. Looking around him he saw the blue sky with the sun shining brightly. Once more he drove his weak hand to write:

"Sky ordinary deep blue sun very bright. Sand all gone 40,000."

The oxygen from his second tank was all gone, too, and he turned the cock to start the supply from the third. He hung there, seven and a half miles above the earth, almost helpless, his mind working with an effort, but still working and realizing that he was nearly half a mile below the peak of his previous effort.

Toward the topmost point of its lift a balloon swings up and down, just like the two sides of a scale will do before they balance each other perfectly. Now the balloon swung up to 42,220 feet, slowly drifting down one hundred and twenty feet in a matter of four minutes. Then it started upward again and got to 42,220 feet once more.

The aeronaut, almost helpless physically, must still have been conscious. His eyes must have noted the point to which he rose the second time, his brain must have grasped that it was the peak of the oscillation. Gathering his strength, he must have dropped the battery and sent the balloon up to 42,470 feet, over eight miles high.

He had planned to cut away the framework supporting the ballast bags when they were exhausted; he had intended to cut away the second oxygen tank. Had he lightened the balloon by doing this he would have risen still higher.

Why did he alter his carefully laid plans and omit to do these things? The experts think he knew that time was too short for him to go higher and remain there as he intended, that he knew his remaining cylinder of oxygen would not last more than about half an hour and that unless he got down quickly he would not reach earth alive.

Personally I should say this was only part of the reason. I think that he was physically unable to cut away the frame and the cylinder, that the actions demanded were too much for his strength. Somehow he managed to drop the battery. From the direction and speed at which the balloon was traveling it was found just where it would have fallen if it had been jettisoned at the top of the second oscillation to take the balloon to its highest point.

He could do no more. His mind was in a haze. The things he had to do now were engraved so deeply on his brain that he did them as in a dream.

It was first and foremost the clock which had played him false. He thought of everything, all the other instruments were taken to the clockmaker to have the oil cleaned from them—but somehow the clock was forgotten. It was such a tiny slip, such a small omission, but it was absolutely fatal.

If, after 3:17, he had been able to tell the time accurately and could gage with certainty that he was rising too slowly to his topmost point, I feel sure that Captain Gray, considering the great care and foresight he exercised in planning his ascent, would have valved his balloon sooner and returned safely to earth. His scientific mind would have taught him that the time of an ascent in May and one in November might vary owing to different atmospheric conditions, and though he was as brave as a lion he would have known that things were against his equaling his previous ascent, and he would have come down to try again another day.

But the clock froze, and the man was robbed of the instrument on which his life depended. It is almost impossible for people on the earth, in full possession of their faculties, to calculate time accurately—as you will find out if you ask half a dozen friends to tell you when a minute has gone by the watch, even though some hold their pulse as a sort of guide. What chance has a gallant man, miles high above the earth, practically paralyzed owing to the reduced pressure, of retaining a glimmer of consciousness by an intense effort—what chance has he of estimating the passage of time?

At the top of his climb, and when he began to swing down again, he managed to make the effort required to valve the balloon and let out some of the gas. This is certain. Had it been otherwise his curve on the barograph would have swung up and down, whereas it descended steadily.

He was dropping to life, but it had become a thrilling race between the oxygen and time. Probably when he first valved the balloon he was exhausted by the effort. Owing to the state of his mind, his judgment, too, was perhaps a bit fogged. With a clearer mind and a little more strength to make hands more obedient to the directing brain, he would probably have let out more gas to bring him down faster when he started to drop. But here again the previous experience when he was forced to jump, owing to the balloon falling too quickly, may have stayed his hand, made him too cautious.

Every moment he was using up the life giving oxygen. Unless he could get down to an atmosphere in which he could manage to breathe normally, he was doomed. In twenty minutes he descended only 3,470 feet. He must have recognized the extreme danger, for he managed to call up some hidden reserves of strength and valve the balloon again to send it downward more rapidly. But he was too late—some ten or fifteen minutes behind schedule; just those fifteen minutes lost in coming down too slowly. I think the first effort to valve the balloon was too much for him, that he became unconscious, that the oxygen flowing to his mask pulled him round to make that last effort to save his life.

The clock that stopped condemned him to die. By 4:38 he breathed the last of the oxygen from the cylinder. He was still 35,000 feet high, with too little oxygen in the air and too small a pressure to keep the blood circulating. He lapsed again into unconsciousness, and when the balloon came down in Tennessee he was found dead beside his sealed instruments. In less than three hours the balloon had covered more than three hundred miles!

After an initial flight, the scientific pioneer twice touched the highest point in the air ever reached by man. The first flight rendered him unconscious; his second drove him to leap for life from his balloon; still he was not deterred. The third time a trifling oversight—something which had been foreseen and guarded against in all the other instruments, but was overlooked in the most vital instrument of all—robbed him of life.

A forgotten drop of oil, intense cold, and a clock that froze . . . Death is a terrible penalty to exact for such a trifle. A clock ceased to tick, and a brave man ceased to be.

Thus Captain Gray found peace among the men who have honored and glorified science by the sacrifice of their lives.

TUAN'S GOLD

A Novelette of Deep Sea Treasure

By RALPH R. PERRY

IN SINGAPORE the weather was hot and sultry. Down the squalid street of sailors' lodging houses eddied an occasional puff of air, blowing now from this direction, now from that; selecting each time from the multitudinous smells of a tropical city stewing under the sun one overpowering odor. For the most part the breeze bore stenches, alternately the nastiest of East and West—garbage reek, the stale fumes of beer, the foul breath of filthy houses and unwashed humanity—yet among these odors came occasionally the keen and heady fragrance of eaglewood incense. Lungs and nose waited for it, to breathe deep; for Dan Flynn the perfume compensated for the other outrages inflicted upon his nostrils.

He sat on the broken steps of a wooden fronted shack, the tin roof of which, as he knew from unpleasant experience, had rusted into innumerable pinholes. His gear was piled at his feet. With less than a shilling left he was barred even from such scurvy lodgings, and before he pawned his diving equipment he would starve. The big copper helmet, the rubber suit, the airlines and the air pump, all boxed, formed a mountain of gear which drew a glance of curiosity from every passer-by. From the midst of his possessions Flynn met every heavy lidded Oriental glance with a wide Irish grin.

Light blue eyes danced. A pug nose wrinkled to sniff the savor of eaglewood, red hair seemed to curl and crackle with the excess of energy in the spare, sinewy body. By sheer superabundance of animal spirits his personality dominated that squalid street, so that work worn Chinese and round faced, lackadaisical Malays caught a spark of his fire, smiled back, and stepped more jauntily on their way.

Dan Flynn was thirty. Ex-racing auto driver, ex-torpedo man in the Navy, ex-sailor, and at this moment on the point of becoming an ex-deep sea diver; through twelve years and over half the world he had sought the job which would be, as he phrased it, "really something to write home about"—something which would exhaust the energy of muscle and nerve while it lasted, and which would also leave a memory that would be an abiding satisfaction. The first part of his desire was not difficult to obtain, but since the war the second half had eluded him.

To skid a car around a curve for prize money was only a job. High risk and high pay, yet still nothing but a job, and monotonous after the novelty wore off. Deep sea diving was the same, without the thrill of speed. In his heart Flynn prayed for another war. Meanwhile he had what fun he could, spent his pay and grinned when he was broke. What of it? It would all be the same in a hundred years.

Into the squalid street turned the tallest white man Flynn had ever seen. The stranger was not less than six feet eight, with enormous feet and a long curved

nose and small gray eyes set close together. He stopped in front of the red headed diver and with an imperturbable gravity utterly English, he surveyed Flynn and his gear as though he were an exhibit.

"You're Dan Flynn, the diver," he said after five seconds' scrutiny.

"Righto, Sherlock," said Flynn sarcastically.

He did not like the stranger. The gray eyes were too cold and too close together. The thin lips had a cynical twist, and the white ducks were slightly soiled. All these things were trifles, but they gave the man an air of trying to pass himself off for something he was not.

"I'm Captain Tom Smythe, of the schooner *Rum Go*," he announced.

"Is that so?" Flynn retorted.

The close set gray eyes regarded him without humor and without sign of having taken offense.

"Quite. You're—er—a Yankee?"

"Maybe I pass for a Yankee out here," said Flynn uncordially. "The facts are that my mother was from Georgia and my old man from Iowa. I was born in Philly—which makes me just plain United States. Regular American brand, see? What's it to you?"

"Nothing. But to you a matter of a thousand pounds."

Smythe's answer was like a blow. Flynn decided this tall man did not lack force.

"I'm here," Smythe went on, "because you are a Ya—an American, if you prefer—and a deep sea diver. I assume—" he sniffed the air, in which at the moment the sour smell of garbage was predominant—"that you'd like a job. The other divers in Singapore work either for the gov-

ernment or are under contract at the shipyards."

"You said it! And compared to the closed corporation they got, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers is an open shop outfit. Did those bozos tell you where to find me?"

"That doesn't matter," Smythe remarked, and sat down on the broken steps. Again he surveyed Flynn from red head to work shoes.

"I need a capable diver, strange to this coast, and willing to leave Malaysia. They are rare, and as a beggar I can't choose. Will you take an unusual billet?"

"Probably," said Flynn.

"Nearly forty years ago—" Smythe's voice dropped to a whisper, although not a white face was visible on the street—"a certain ship steamed out of Singapore carrying eighteen thousand pounds in good English guineas in her strong room. No sign of her—no wreckage, no man of her crew—has been seen since. Will you raise that gold?"

"That's the kind of job I'm looking for."

"Then send your gear aboard my schooner," Smythe instructed. "Better give it out that you've bought passage north. The *Rum Go* comes and goes. No one pays any attention to us and the job won't take three days. You'll be paid a thousand pounds."

The schooner captain gathered his long legs under him to rise. Flynn caught his shoulder.

"Not so fast," the diver contradicted. "I'm to sail up coast, where you ain't said. Dive into a ship you ain't named, working for a firm I ain't heard you mention. I like to know more about a job than the amount of pay I'm going to get, Mr. Smythe!"

"I am in honor bound not to say."

"You mean the job's crooked?"

The close set gray eyes studied Flynn coolly.

"Just this side of the law—for you. As an American working for wages you will not be held responsible. The gold has been sunk for forty years and is treasure trove. Legally, twenty per cent. belongs to the Crown, and the balance to the finder. The case involves the honor of a Malay and the prestige of the British local government, neither of which concerns an American directly. That is all I can say. Shall I call a coolie for your gear, or not?"

Flynn's eyes were half shut, but his grin was jaunty and provocative.

"You'll let me decide about the job on the spot—as an American?" he challenged.

Smythe nodded. Instantly Flynn beckoned to the nearest coolie.

II

SALEH RAHMAN, called the Strong One, sat in a hut of thatch built where the river which flowed past his native village joined the sea. From a slate gray sky cascaded rain. The surf that beat upon the beach flung its farthest drops through the flimsy walls, joining with the drip from the roof to drench him to the skin. His *sarong* of dark red cotton clung to his torso, revealing pectorals like segments of iron armoring the broad chest and an abdomen ridged and lean, like that of an athlete. Age had brought streaks of gray in the straight black hair and covered the broad face with innumerable wrinkles, but it had done little to sap the great strength of the man. At sixty, Saleh was still the Strong One. The fire that had been his in youth still burned in the deep set eyes under the heavy, grizzled brows.

Before him the gale merged sky and sea into a gray unity, white below from surf and foam, darkest overhead. Dimly through wind driven rain he could make out a schooner, hove-to a mile offshore. By the patched main sail he knew the *Rum Go*. The gale was proving too strong for her. Though hove-to, she was slowly drifting back toward the surf, an unbroken barrier all along that coast save for the fifty yard gap of the river mouth.

Saleh felt neither rain nor cold. Once more his fate depended upon the courage and wisdom of a white *tuan*.

"It is Allah's will," he muttered, but clenched fists belied the pious words.

For once—but once, in all his lifetime, might he not hold his destiny in his own two hands? He lacked neither courage nor strength nor patience. Yet it was the *tuans* who possessed the wisdom and the power and the freedom.

Two white men had blocked his ambitions for forty years. Offshore were two other white men, coming at his will to undo the work of the first pair. And these last were drifting to ignoble wreck. The Malay's great fist clenched, but as always, he could only wait. In rain and gale the opportunity had come, forty years ago in his hot youth. In rain and gale it was now vanishing.

In stating that the sunken gold involved the honor of a Malay and the prestige of the British local government, Tom Smythe had neither exaggerated nor lied. He had simply failed to add that Saleh's honor was that of old Malaysia. Saleh had won title to the specie by the *kris*, but he considered it not less rightfully his on that account. In his vocabulary was no such word as pirate. In his youth a Malay was a peasant, or a warrior; and though the land had changed under the rule of the British, though there were rubber plantations where he remembered jungle, Saleh was still a warrior. If he had delayed in taking what was his own, it was only because he realized that the power of the British exceeded his. A warrior may legitimately employ both patience and craft.

He had waited long . . .

It had been in '92, on a night of rain and wind, that the coastwise steamer *Lady Bristol* had steered too close to the unlighted coast and stranded on the shoal that jutted out near the mouth of the little river. The men of two villages had gathered, eager and fearful. While the elders wrangled over whether the ship should be attacked or not, Saleh had stared fiercely at the dim yellow lights visible through the rain. He was the son of the village headman and his great strength gave him influence.

"Attack!" he muttered, walking from youth to youth of his own age. "Attack, whatever the graybeards say! See—the ship can not move. The vessels of the *tuans* no longer carry cannon."

"Attack!" shouted Kassim Rahman, his father. "One hour with the *kris*, and ye will have no need to grub for rice in the mud, or beg *tuan* Sommers to dole ye out silver for cutting his bridle paths through the jungle, that he may ride to our village to hold court and give orders!"

But Iwan Perba, headman of the other village, counseled nay. The *tuans* were strong. Who knew what weapons they had? See, they labored to free their ship. Ere the attack could be made they would steam on . . .

In the end the men of Saleh's village attacked alone. They shoved from the shore, jeering Perba's followers for cowards and women. Forty strong, they paddled alongside the ship, unseen in the rain, and boarded over the low waist before a shot was fired. The crew were grouped on the forecastle head, laboring to free the ship by jettisoning cargo. There Saleh killed his first man. The wave of Malays behind him cut down the rest before he could raise his *kris* again. *Ya Allah!* That had been a night! The deck was won with no fight at all.

Saleh raised the shrill *sorak* and rushed for the bridge, quicker even than his father. Down the ladder a white man in a blue coat leaped upon him with bare fists. A brave man. Saleh's steel struck where neck joins shoulder. His bare feet tramped a limp body as he rushed the stairs, but the *tuan's* fall had checked the advance an instant. Above Saleh a revolver spat. His father coughed and pitched headlong; a bell clanged a warning—and the ship quivered and slid stern first from the shoal.

The *sorak* died into silence—till Saleh raised it again, sprang up the ladder and cut down a man whose last shot burned his cheek. Even with the bridge won the Malays hesitated. The engines moved, the lights of their village ashore grew

dimmer through the rain; their boats would be left behind.

BUT SALEH shouted to stop the engines, led the way toward the lower decks. They followed him. Even after forty years, the thrill of the moment in which he knew they were following him could warm his heart. He and no other had won the ship—what though he had lost her again because of a *tuan's* craft and courage . . .

The gloom of that stokehold, relieved by two shafts of red light from the open fire door, was still vivid to Saleh. He had rallied the attack so quickly that the engineers had no time to secure firearms. The chief held a slice bar white hot at the tip. He was a bigger man than Saleh himself, yellow bearded, long haired. He did not cry out, but gazed coolly at the Malays pouring down the ladder. There were a dozen. The *tuan* knew he was to die, yet the bearded lips bared with fierce joy. He was a man.

With him was but one Chinese coolie whose face was ashen from terror; he pawed at a bunker door and whined. The white *tuan* caught him by the pigtail and shook him so fiercely that pain overcame panic. Into the yellow hand he thrust a key and stood on guard with the slice bar poised like a spear.

"Unlock the sea valve, Wong," he boomed.

The bar darted at Selah's chest and burned a weal from breast to shoulder, so that the Strong One sprang back. Behind the *tuan's* knees the coolie knelt on the steel deck, opened a padlock, whirled a wheel, while Saleh dodged to left and right to slip past that white hot point of iron. He wondered why the *tuan* smiled when the padlock clicked again, wondered why he stooped for the key, but seized the advantage and leaped in as the bar wavered.

The white man did not seek to defend himself, only, before the *kris* struck, he flung the key through the open fire doors. Before his body was quite still cold sea water lipped above the deck and spread swiftly toward the red hot fire bars.

"Strong One! Here is a door we can not break!" men screamed at Saleh.

To obey the call was a relief, for the *tuan's* dead face mocked him. The white man had not fought his best, and Saleh did not understand. He was glad to be able to use his strength against a door too strong for his companions. The crash and boom of his blows brought back warmth to his heart. He persisted, battering at lock and hinges with a heavy sledge after the comrades who had summoned him ran away in search of easier loot.

When the door yielded Saleh was alone. The room he entered held only a few wooden boxes. He smashed the nearest with an angry swing of the sledge. Gold coins skittered across the deck.

Then he shouted—too late. His yell was drowned by the dull hiss and roar of exploding boilers. The ship leaped upward under his feet, then settled, keeling over. The lights went out.

Saleh was strong. He scooped a handful of gold coins from the deck, picked up a heavy box and ran through dark passageways while he heard the bulkheads break below. The decks were empty when he reached the open air. His comrades had jumped into their boats. For a moment Saleh thought he was deserted. He peered through the rain, noting the surf breaking on the end of the shoal, the lights of the village, pale in the rain, almost at right angles. Then a boat drove under the side toward him, and he jumped. The heavy box bore him down, forcing him to let it go. He swam upward and flung himself into the boat.

Ambuil That had been a night! What followed was less pleasant. Forty men had attacked; six and thirty returned. Perba mocked them as they stepped ashore, asking them for their loot. The English would be very angry. Already, he said, his men were gathering up the wreckage drifting ashore, to burn or hide it. They would all be hanged.

To silence the cackle Saleh walked up to the headman and thrust the gold coins under his nose.

"Of these there is a roomful," he said.

Perba snatched them, sucking in his lips greedily.

"How get gold sunk deep in the sea?" he scoffed.

"*Tuans* can do it, and I can hire them," said Saleh stoutly.

"*We* can hire," said Perba.

"Not so, old man. Where was the ship when it sank?" Saleh challenged—and knew, by the rage that flitted across the crafty face, that he had scored. None but himself had thought to take bearings.

"None the less half the gold is mine if I avert the wrath of the British *raj* from your head."

"Does the tiger share with the snake? We will be rich, and you will rub soot on your face. I swear it!" said Saleh violently.

Ambuil That had been long ago. The power of the British *raj* had seemed no stronger than a silken thread, and Perba's enmity no more account than the scolding of a woman.

He had learned differently when *tuan* Sommers, political officer of the district, rode in to investigate rumors of the loss of the *Lady Bristol.*

The *tuan* Sommers knew the rumors were true, though he could not prove them. What baffled the white man was the fact that no wreckage had come ashore and that the hulk could not be found. For Malays to capture a ship in the open sea was impossible, but failing to find a ship made his case lack a *corpus delicti.* Yet Saleh read conviction in the white man's face and realized that another *tuan* had come to guard the treasure. While Sommers lived he would leap at any opportunity to prove his suspicions correct.

With the patience of the Oriental he waited for the menace of Sommers to be removed; waited while his hair grayed, while Sommers was promoted from political office to resident, until at last the word came, brought by a Malay youth whose father had not been born when the *Bristol Lady* sank, that the white lord was dead.

"*Allah Bismillah!*" Saleh had breathed—and sent a message to Tom Smythe of the *Rum Go.* He had chosen the Englishman long before as a man willing to aid a Malay to recover his loot—for a sufficient percentage. Saleh did not trust Smythe too much, but he had little room for choice.

Saleh dared to face all possible chance of failure provided that once again he might taste the excitement of danger and conflict. It was the prospect that the schooner drifting offshore might wreck his hopes while he sat that made his fists clench. If he could but hold that steering wheel—if he could set his strength against the storm—he would have been content whatever the outcome.

Suddenly, as he watched, the schooner came about. Her bow pointed for the shore, where the river mouth offered a narrow haven. The gale made the ship leap forward like a spurred horse.

Saleh shouted and rushed from the hut, knee deep into the surf. His seaman's eye saw at a glance that Smythe's desperate maneuver was doomed to fail. The schooner's leeway would carry her on to the sands, but the old Malay scarcely cared. To dare the one chance of safety, to strike bravely under full sail—that was the choice of a man! A wrecked schooner was a small matter if the white man through whom he was forced to work were worthy of his responsibility and trust.

III

DAN FLYNN also revised his estimate of Smythe as the schooner's helm went up and the low coast swung toward them like a white edged sword blade. Whatever his faults, the tall Englishman possessed the courage of a gambler. Driven to leeward of the river mouth, he only eased the sheet to gain more speed, and crouched beside the wheel without a glance or word to his red headed companion.

On the back of a long comber they hurtled into the surf, hit with a jar that loosened every bottom plank, only to be flung onward by sheer speed and pile up on the very edge of the beach. Instantly —in the fraction of time that the schooner remained head-on—before the waves could fling her broadside, Smythe darted forward and jumped off the bow. He landed knee deep in the back wash of the surf, stumbled, but kept his feet and made the land without wetting his hair.

Flynn, unwarned, stuck to his place in the stern during that critical second. The mainmast fell and blocked his path to the bow. When he jumped the water closed over his head. The backwash spun him like a pinwheel, slammed him against the bottom, dazed him. He could only fight to hold air in his lungs. In the surge and battle of surf and undertow he lost all sense of direction. He tried to swim, not knowing whether he was swimming toward the beach or the sea. Twice he was washed back and forth, now on the surf, now scraping the bottom. He experienced all the agony of drowning.

A hand caught his ankle. A strength greater than the tug of the waters held him fast. The retreating wave scoured his face with sand; then he was jerked into the air. The brown beach, a palm bending in the gale, gyrated round and round as his dizzy brain sought to orient itself—and fastened upon the one fixed point in the swirl of earth and sky; a broad face lined with wrinkles, a pair of fierce dark eyes. Gradually Flynn added a body to the face and became conscious of the mighty embrace of Saleh's arms. Next he located Smythe, who was stamping up and down the beach cursing the sea because his schooner was wrecked. The violence and foulness of his profanity made it sound only the more futile. The raindrops dripping from the end of the long nose was the final touch of comedy, and Flynn grinned. Into the fierce dark eyes above him flashed an answering glint of amusement.

"The sea has hands, but not eyes or ears," rumbled the Malay.

Smythe overheard. He turned angrily.

"All the diving gear is aboard, too," he roared. "D'you think the *tuan* Flynn can swim down into your damned ship, Saleh?"

"The waves drive her farther up the beach. Tomorrow at low tide you may walk aboard her with dry feet," said the Malay. "For a boat I have a *pakerangan* at the village."

"He can't dive from a twenty-foot dugout even if the sides are built up," Smythe contradicted violently. "I've got to get that money now! It means England to me, d'you understand— *England*, and to be done with this hot, stinking country." Disaster had stripped Smythe of his control. He stamped on the hard sand. "You'll have to wait till I have hired another schooner!"

"I have waited forty years," said the Malay, deep in his great chest; but he looked down at Flynn with a question in his eyes. "The *pakerangan* is strong," he murmured.

"I can dive from a raft," said Flynn instantly. "But—are you the boss?"

"Yes; he's the Malay who knows where the wreck's sunk," Smythe rasped. "But damn it, Yank, you don't understand at all. There's another village of Malays here that's just as anxious to get that specie as we are, and the political agent is sure to barge in here to investigate the stranding of my schooner. George Bradshaw's no easy nut to crack, and neither is Nagh Perba, damn his yellow hide! With the three of us here taking on half the Malays and the whole British government, we need something better than a blasted rotten dugout!"

Flynn squirmed out of Saleh's arms.

"Yeah?" He grinned. "I'm learning things. A schooner just means a quicker getaway. Why get so hot about that? Is it a—habit?"

"Because Saleh here is suspected of being one of the pirates that sank the *Lady Bristol!*" roared Smythe. "Bradshaw will seize the specie from him in a

minute, whereas if it is in our possession it's treasure trove. Do you think I came up here and lost my schooner to help a brown pirate recover his loot?"

"I think you came up here to doublecross Saleh—and me," Flynn answered instantly. "In the States we don't think much of doublecrossers, nor of skippers who leave their passengers flat-footed."

Rapid as the interchange of English had been, Saleh got the sense of it.

"Cold and an empty belly breed anger, *tuans*," he interposed gravely. "In the village are fire and rice, and rice wine since you are not of the true faith."

Flynn nodded to the old Malay, but did not stir. The square face was set as though it had never smiled.

"I savvy now how you figured this job was just this side of the law—and I'm no catspaw for you or the Malay government," he said to Smythe. "Which of the two you're working for I don't give a damn. You came here to doublecross a guy that just saved my life, and in the States we like to see the underdog get a break."

"Nevertheless, he's a pirate. Ask him." Smythe sneered.

"What do you want with this jack?" Flynn demanded of the Malay. "You can't spend it!"

"No, *tuan*," said the Malay in his deep voice. "My village followed my father and me against a ship such as we Malays had never dared attack before. Though we won, because the gold was lost, we gained little honor. Likewise, the village of the Perbas laughed when I showed a piece of gold, and kept it by a trick. *Ya Allah*, Iwan Perba laughed in my face, that his village might mock mine. Is it right, *tuan*, that the crafty mock the brave? Are Malays who dig around the roots of rubber trees men?"

"If that's piracy there's nothing mean about it," said Flynn vigorously. "He's a square guy according to his lights, and I'm for him. You don't go after any schooner." The American turned to Saleh.

"I will dive from your raft as soon as the seas get calm," he said curtly.

"It is well," said the Malay, though he looked anxiously from man to man. "Yet—not in the day. You have a light that shines under water?"

"Sure. It's always dark as night inside a ship. I can dive at night if you can find the hull."

The ghost of a smile flitted across Saleh's wrinkled face. He moved toward Smythe and put his great hand on the tall man's shoulder.

"You will help me, *tuan?*" he asked gravely. "We are but three among many, and the name 'pirate' I do not understand. I have trusted you with all, save the place where the *tuan* with the beard sank the ship. You will come to the village and share my salt."

"Guess I must if I want to see England. Yes, of course," said Smythe.

The impassive mask was back in its place upon his features, but though the Malay was satisfied, Flynn listed the tall Englishman as a third enemy, even more dangerous than a rival Malay or a political officer.

IV

THE *pakerangan* proved to be adequate. It was a little unstable for a diving tender, and a little heavy for three men to handle; but under the cabin of palm leaves built near the stern was sufficient elbow room to work the air pump. On the night following the wreck of the schooner the three men pushed off from the beach two hours before dawn. Normally a Malay village would have been asleep for hours, but although Saleh took every precaution to keep any sign of unwonted activity from being observable from Nagh Perba's *kampong*—there was only one light kept to provide him with a bearing, and he refused to divulge the secret of the location of the *Lady Bristol* by taking paddlers—he could not prevent the men of the village from gathering on the beach.

The night was windless, starlit and very still. Saleh enjoined silence, yet none the less the murmur and stir of an

excited crowd made a sound like the rustle of a gentle breeze among palm fronds. Its sibilance pursued Flynn across the glassy water, reminding him he was embarked on a venture critical and desperate. Otherwise, the darkness, the faint gleam of the single light, and Saleh's noiseless strokes recalled a canoe ride on a summer evening.

After a half-mile of paddling the Malay threw out a grapnel. Flynn had little idea of the position. By the stars the American judged the light ashore to bear almost due west; but the location of the shoal which was the Malay's cross bearing was not imprinted on the diver's brain by a lifetime of observation; and except in rough weather no breakers marked its position. Yet the grapnel caught almost immediately.

"Anchor, *tuan*," Saleh whispered, and there was a catch in his voice.

While the anchors plopped into the sea and Flynn drew the diving suit over woolen undergarments already donned, he was conscious of the Malay's breathing.

"Do not pump too hard," Flynn cautioned, and swiftly ran over the diving signals with Smythe, who was to tend the lifeline.

One pull, more air; two pulls, more slack on the lifeline; three pulls, coming up; four pulls, haul me up; five pulls, send down a line. Then he dragged himself over the gunwale, climbed down a short rope ladder, and swung off on the descending line. Smythe lowered him steadily. When his feet touched bottom he snapped on his light.

He was standing on the deck of a ship which had sunk almost on an even keel. Marine weed, high as his knees, waved gently. His light, which illuminated a circle barely ten feet in diameter, did not reveal whether he stood on the bow or stern. To keep himself from getting lost he tied a circling line on to the heavy rope by which he had descended, and moved forward at random.

Before him a perpendicular mass of weed loomed out of the darkness like a cliff. In the bottom was the dark hole of a door. Flynn judged he was on the forward well deck. He gave two pulls for more slack and moved inch by inch into the bowels of the ship. Saleh had said the strong room was in a cross passage directly under the bridge. Flynn found it. He pulled back a door that sagged from broken hinges and flashed his light into a cavern black with forty years of rust, with nodules of red rust protruding here and there like pimples.

No weed grew here, for light never penetrated. In the far corner were four wooden boxes. Flynn scraped his foot, stirring up a black rust cloud that swirled like ink dropped into a bowl of water, and flashed his light downward when the murk settled. He was standing on gold coins.

Nothing stirs the imagination like gold. Dan Flynn saw himself back in the United States, rich. He heard music, saw the flirt of a chiffon evening dress, then, grinning to himself inside his helmet, tried the wood of the boxes with his knife. The oak was sound in spite of its long immersion. He could carry out the boxes in his arms, scoop up the loose gold in a sack, and—yes, he could finish in this one dive. He had been under less than thirty minutes. An hour would see the end.

He picked up a box, found that he could carry another, though with great difficulty, and retraced his path through the passages out onto the weed grown deck, where he deposited his burden by the open door. Two tugs on the lifeline signaled Smythe to give him slack again. To Flynn's amazement the respond was four imperative jerks, swiftly repeated.

Come up? Flynn was damned if he would! He jerked the line for more slack, and again received four jerks in answer. The lifeline tightened, dragging him across the deck. Had he been in the passage such unskilled tending might have drowned him; as it was, he shuffled along the deck, swearing aloud, and pulled the line four times himself to signal he was ready to be hauled up.

Instantly he was swung off the bottom

and lifted hand over hand with a speed that astonished him. As his head broke water he could see that both Smythe and Saleh were lifting him. The former leaned over the side and snatched the electric torch from his hand; the latter stooped and lifted Flynn into the boat—leaden shoes, leaden weights, copper helmet and all. Without removing his helmet both scrambled for the anchors and raised them in desperate haste. Saleh then bent to his paddle. Smythe unscrewed the helmet, clapping his hand over Flynn's mouth.

"There's a boat after us," he whispered. "We could hear the paddles dip and a man spit. They're working out this way."

Saleh sculled the *pakerangan* without a sound, heading toward the light of the village.

"*Tuan*, did you find—"

"Yeah, plenty," Flynn answered softly. Smythe inhaled sibilantly.

"I'll get it all next dive. I need a rope and a bag," the diver exclaimed. "There's four cases beside the loose gold. Who's after us?"

"Nagh Perba, Saleh thinks," Smythe whispered.

FROM behind arose a sudden shrill yell in many voices. The *pakerangan* had been seen, either in the starlight or silhouetted against the shore light. Saleh abandoned caution. The water boiled after a mighty stroke of his paddle.

"Paddle, *tuans!*" he grunted.

Smythe obeyed, but Flynn, hampered by his suit, could do nothing. He managed to free himself of leaden shoes and body weights while the boat drove for the beach, but to detach the breast plate from the suit alone was beyond him. The *sorak* in the rear, driven by a dozen paddles, drew closer every second, the pursuing boat making three feet to their one.

Fortunately, however, Saleh had obtained a long start. The white line of the beach was visible ahead, with men running up and down it like ants. From the shore defiant yells answered the cries from Perba's boat. A craft pushed off and started to Saleh's aid, and Flynn thought they would reach the land in safety when a tall prow with a white curl of water boiling beneath it loomed up in the dark directly behind him. A dugout crammed with yelling Malays struck the *pakerangan* violently in the stern, rebounded and ranged alongside. The bow paddlers swung their blades at Saleh's head. The Malay knocked one man sprawling; then a dozen boarded from bow to stern with one simultaneous leap.

Flynn clinched with the foremost and rolled into the bottom. In the heavy diving suit he could do no more. Saleh met the full force of the attack. The paddle splintered at the second blow, but the splintered stub jabbed into a Malay face, brought a howl of anguish. The boarders recoiled and, bull-like, Saleh charged.

He smashed through the palm thatched cabin until he bestrode Flynn. The paddle handle flailed right and left, keeping the attackers at a distance. They had knives. Once a Malay dodged inside the swing of Saleh's club. That man was caught by the throat and hurled overboard with one mighty heave, and before there was another opening the *pakerangan* rocked to another collision. From the opposite side the men of Saleh's village leaped across her deck to grapple with the attackers.

The blast of a whistle cut the air. The assailants jumped for their own boat, or into the water, and with a howl of triumph Nagh Perba's men withdrew with all the speed of paddles hastily seized. In the water around the *pakerangan* there was a series of desperate struggles between swimming men, but for the most part, the assailants made good their escape. Flynn had choked his man senseless. Another lay across the stern with a scalp bleeding from the first mighty stroke of Saleh's paddle; a third was ducked until he was hauled out of the water unconscious.

"*Ya Allah, tuan!* They had not wit to

overturn the boat and send the gear to the bottom!" Saleh bellowed exultantly. "Women they are—women then, and women now. Are you hurt, *tuan?*"

"Not me," Flynn grunted. "Hey, Smythe—sing out!"

Silence. The attack had not been wholly unsuccessful. The Englishman was gone.

"I wondered why the guy I was wrestling with didn't use his knife," said Flynn slowly. "Saleh, those guys were out to swipe your *tuans*. What'll they do with him?"

"Allah knows," Saleh rumbled.

With half the village aiding, to get the *pakerangan* to the beach was the work of a moment. Hastily Flynn examined the gear. He found the air pump undamaged and the airlines sound. Saleh, meanwhile, sat on the bow without a word.

"I found the gold," said Flynn. "I can get it in another dive, and right now, while they're gloating over Smythe, would be a good time to make it. I'd trust you to handle the lines and superintend the pumping, but— Oh, hell, I only *think* Smythe's a doublecrossing crook. He's a white man and he fought. I saw him hit one of those birds—"

"He is my *tuan*," Saleh answered quietly. "If he is harmed it will be soot rubbed in my face." The old Malay paused. "You have seen the gold?" he asked wistfully. "Forty years ago the coins went rolling across the deck and my heart burst with pride."

"Give me an hour under water and I'll put the whole lot in your hands. But an hour right now—"

Saleh nodded as Flynn left the sentence unfinished.

"It is now that the *tuan*—Smythe—lies bound in the *kampong* of Nagh Perba, who is a snake," he agreed gravely. "Who can guess the purpose, or the courage, of a snake? I must go to the *kampong* and see for myself."

"*We* must see," the American corrected. "Don't try to argue. I can't sit here and wait while there's another *tuan* in trouble."

The frown that appeared on Saleh's face expressed a dozen reasons why he did not approve of Flynn's decision.

"The white man has spoken," he said, and turned to roar a command for silence to the crowd that jostled them both.

V

A TORCH had been kindled. A reddish yellow glare turned excited faces to the hue of copper. Around the *pakerangan* milled every man and boy of Saleh's village, and minute by minute the crowd was changing its character.

A man would run out of the circle of torchlight. Instantly his place would be taken by another coming from the village, but whereas the former left empty handed, the latter returned bearing arms. Spears and *krises* appeared, ancient flintlock muskets. The blood of the Malays was up. They screamed to Saleh to lead them against the dogs who had attacked them.

Swiftly out of chaos the old Malay brought order and discipline. By his voice first, in extreme cases by the grip of his huge hands, he roared and shook a mob into a unit at least partially disciplined. All the weapons were given to about a score of the older and cooler men. Of these Saleh appointed the *haji*, Mat—wizened, one eyed and old, conspicuous despite his small stature by reason of his green turban—as his lieutenant. Upon the *haji* Saleh impressed the fact that only as a last resort must there be an armed assault on the Perba *kampong*. Battle was certain to bring down the wrath of the British. The old men were to lie in ambush while the *tuan* with the red hair and he reconnoitered.

When the party became silent Saleh led the way up the bank of the river with Flynn tramping at his heels and the score of warriors following noiselessly behind. The distance was short. A ten minute march, with jungle on the left and the river on the right, and they debouched on the edge of a rice field which surrounded Perba's *kampong* on three sides, the river forming the fourth. Here Saleh posted his

men and, taking only a *kris*, waded into the stream and swam to the far bank, Flynn still behind.

The American wondered how two men could enter a *kampong* that was awake and swarming with curs, but the feat proved simple. Saleh circled the river until he was upstream, then entered the river again and floated down with the current. The *kampong* was built on piles above the river bank. Its floor was a man's height above the mud. Saleh let himself drift to the bank, where the boats were drawn up. There was a sentry on the veranda above them. Flynn heard the man spit betel juice, but the Malay's attention must have been directed downstream. He went on spitting while the two scouts crawled up the bank, flattening themselves behind a small dugout. Once beneath the veranda the sentry was no longer a danger. Beams of light shot down through the cracks in the split bamboo flooring, and they were guided also by the murmur of voices.

Though it was the dark, cold hour before the dawn, Perba's *kampong* was wide awake. Saleh crawled through the stinking mixture of mud and garbage to the center of the structure. The council was taking place overhead.

"I tell you I don't know where the blasted hulk is," Smythe broke out. Flynn started. He was directly beneath the prisoner, and the voice was astonishingly clear, defiant, almost angry. "Take away that brazier and talk sense, Nagh Perba. You don't dare torture an Englishman and dashed well you know it."

"The *tuan* might drown," the Malay threatened sulkily.

"Tommyrot," Smythe growled. His courage was beyond dispute. He spoke like the master. "You'll let me walk out of here, that's what you'll do! If you caught the other *tuan* you might have been able to bargain; but me—" Smythe was scornful. "Saleh is thanking you for getting *me* off his hands."

Nagh Perba swore.

"You get no gold while I keep you here," he added sullenly.

Smythe was silent.

"The *tuan* Bradshaw can get a diver like the red headed man," purred the Malay. "If we lead him to the gold our reward will be great."

"The thanks of the *raj* buys no rice," said Smythe scornfully. "When the reward was divided my share wouldn't get me another schooner. You're beaten, Nagh Perba. When you failed to seize the red headed *tuan* you were beaten. Saleh Rahman beat you—with a broken paddle!"

The thin flooring creaked as Nagh Perba leaped to his feet.

"You lie!" he shouted. "Let him keep his *tuan!* Though I failed I will rub soot in his face! I will see his hog's neck in a rope!"

"How?" Smythe taunted.

"When we returned tonight—with only thee," snarled the headman, "I sent a runner to the *tuan* Bradshaw telling him what Saleh Rahman did near this river. The *tuan* is coming with his Sikha. I will spit on the Saleh Rahman, who has called me woman, and refused me my just share of his treasure, when he is led off with his hands linked with iron. *Tuan* Bradshaw will pay me a great reward, and I will count the gold where the Strong One can see."

UNDER the floor Flynn felt the old Malay's giant body quiver.

"*Chelaka*—he is accursed!" Saleh growled under his breath, and rose so recklessly that the American gripped his arm.

"Let's beat it," Flynn whispered. "Smythe's safe and on the level. We may still have time before that Bradshaw gets here."

He pulled Saleh toward the river bank, but the old man refused to crawl. His *kris* was in his hand, and Flynn, who had heard of Malays who ran amok when some disgrace was put upon them that made life unendurable, feared that his partner would break his way into the *kampong* and throw himself upon Nagh Perba single handed.

"Get hold of yourself. We've still time. The east isn't gray yet," whispered the American sharply. "What do you care who knows where the hulk is, now?"

"There is no time to swim the river and crawl through mud," growled Saleh. His voice was vibrant with passion, but level and controlled. "We must steal a boat—and may Allah blind the eye of the man with the gun. Go first, *tuan*; the strongest paddle must be in the stern."

That by going first Saleh's bigger body would be between himself and the flintlock Flynn did not stop to think. He crossed the strip of mud between the overhang of the veranda and the slim dugout with a single leap, and gave the craft a shove that sent it sliding down the sloping bank. He was scrambling for the bow thwart when the gun exploded. A slug slashed his arm above the elbow. Mud and water splashed into his eyes from the other slugs that missed. The flintlock had been overcharged and loaded halfway to the muzzle. The sound was like a cannon.

Flynn caught up a paddle. Saleh was in the act of stepping into the stern. His leg came up slowly, he seated himself without the shove that should have sent the dugout far down-stream, and groped for what seemed eternity for the paddle. Yet his first stroke had a power that made the dugout leap.

Bent low, expecting a second shot, for the yells of the sentry had brought a swarm of men out of the *kampong* and other boats were being launched from the river bank, Flynn was making two strokes to Saleh's one, yet it was the power from the stern that gave the dugout its speed. The American glanced back, but though the east had become faintly gray, there was not enough light to judge how badly Saleh had been hit. His head was up. The broad shoulders swayed rhythmically, but his features were only a black blot against a slightly less dark sky.

"How are you?" Flynn asked.

There was no response. The paddle strokes were becoming slower and more irregular, and Flynn abandoned the attempt to keep any regular stroke, even two for one. Ahead the line of trees marked the point of the ambush, but from behind the yells of the pursuing Malays had taken a fierce exaltation. Another flintlock boomed, and the slugs cut the water all around the dugout.

"Ahoy, *haji* Mat! Shoot!" Flynn yelled.

The coolness of the wizened old pilgrim to Mecca was likely to be disastrous. He was holding his fire with the wholly laudable desire of pouring a volley of slugs at point-blank range into the boat leading the pursuit, whereas Flynn knew the race might end at any moment. At his cry for help, however, a flintlock was discharged on the river bank. Better still, the supporting party raised the *sorak* and sprang out of their concealment.

At the sight of twenty well armed men on the bank the pursuing dugout backed water, sprung around, and paddled for the shelter of their *kampong*. Still Saleh kept on paddling with the same strength and without a word. He drove the dugout into the bank and promptly crumpled forward, head on knees. Flynn scrambled aft. Blood was trickling from the old Malay's mouth. On his back, just below the shoulder blades, were two wounds. They bled little externally, but the slugs were lodged somewhere in the deep chest. Saleh had been silent because blood choked him. The wounds would have dropped a man less strong in his tracks.

Haji Mat thrust his green turbaned head beside Flynn's and made a clucking noise with his tongue.

"*Ambui!* When the Strong One and I were young we would have climbed their stockade before they were ready," he growled. "What now, *tuan?* Do we fight or run? Nagh Perba would not have dared to pull trigger had his gun pointed at the Strong One's face!"

The boast made Flynn grin.

"We run," he ordered. "Give me as many paddlers as the boat will hold and take the rest back to the village. Nagh Perba has sent for the *tuan* Bradshaw."

The wizened *haji* spat out the last of his

chew of betel nut. Visibly the news did not affect him in the least. It was heard, weighed and accepted without the slightest change of expression.

"Do you run also, *tuan?*" he asked coolly. "The *tuan* Bradshaw is but one, and but two will be the number of his police."

"Can't kill an Englishman."

"True." The *haji* sighed. "But thou, *tuan!*"

"I dive at once," Flynn snapped.

The paddlers were taking their places, and he drew Saleh into the center of the dugout, holding the head on his knee in the way that enabled the wounded man to breathe best. Saleh coughed and his eyes opened.

"Be swift, *tuan,*" he pleaded.

The dugout was shoved from the bank and surged to the thrust of the paddles.

"I'll have the gold up in one dive," Flynn soothed.

There was light enough now to see the wrinkled face on his knee. The dark eyes were fierce, and under the lines drawn by pain the muscles of the Malay's jaw were set in determination.

"You know where—"

"I can find the hulk by dragging a grapnel."

The grizzled head moved impatiently. With a bloody finger Saleh drew a cross on the side of the dugout, the lines of which intersected not quite at right angles. He touched the end of one line, then of a second.

"The house where the thatch is new. You and I alone know that. Here, the end of the shoal. Where that lies any child can tell you. You will not need a *tuan* to pump the machine?"

Flynn shook his head.

"The *haji* Mat is no bungler."

Still Saleh was not satisfied. The dark eyes burned.

"*Tuan*—you heard. That dog would rub my face with soot. *Tuan*—" For an instant blood choked the old Malay. He coughed and cleared his throat, but the shock of his wound was mastering his strength. He did not finish.

"*Tuan — tuan* — always a *tuan,*" he whispered bitterly. "That I can not succeed wholly must be Allah's will."

He closed his eyes and let his head relax against Flynn's knee. The great chest continued to rise and fall, but he was unconscious. Whether he was dying or not Flynn knew too little of medicine to say. The dugout was almost at the village, and to ease the suspense the diver ran over the features of his own problem.

Even with the time spent in dragging for the hull reduced to a minimum by the information Saleh had given him, he had a helper to train. An hour before he could dive, and an hour under water. Once the gold was in the possession of the village Saleh's honor would be satisfied. Death would take him beyond the hand of the *raj,* and before he died, Flynn swore to himself, he should finger gold sovereigns. If the British seized the money later, that, perhaps, might only be justice. It was in any event a problem for the Malays themselves, but if this *tuan* Bradshaw failed to arrive before nine o'clock in the morning Flynn could put his own job through.

The dugout reached the mouth of the river and swung toward the beach. Everything seemed the same. A crowd of Malays still milled around the *pakerangan.* He had only to find a helper and shove off.

As Flynn leaped ashore, however, the crowd parted right and left, as a curtain parts. On the stern of the *pakerangan* sat a bronzed young Englishman with a small yellow mustache. He wore spurred boots, and his white clothing was covered with splashes of mud from a night ride over jungle trails.

Flynn stared at him in dismay.

"Oh, I say—good morning! You're under arrest—all of you," he called crisply. There was a revolver at his side, but the idea he might need to use it did not seem to cross his mind. He glanced from the diving gear to Flynn. "I say, for once Nagh Perba's told the truth," he exclaimed. "So there really is a treasure, what?"

The Englishman smiled pleasantly. He was blandly conscious of his power.

VI

TO FIND the political officer already on the scene affected Flynn like a plunge into cold water. The first shock was paralyzing; immediately thereafter his blood raced and recklessness born of doubled danger stimulated him. His Irish grin had never been more infectious.

"Nagh Perba must think so," he answered with more than a faint touch of irony, "for he attacked us and kidnaped my English pardner. We've been to his *kampong*, and—"

A shrug of Flynn's shoulder called attention to Saleh.

The assurance with which Bradshaw took command of the situation gave the American the first hint as to his quality. Without moving from his seat he gave three orders: to bring a litter, to bring his saddle bag, to bring the corporal of his police. While the Malays scattered to his bidding he studied Flynn in silence.

The Englishman looked bored, the American amused. Neither gave the other any clue to what he knew, or intended; yet in that silent interchange respect grew between them—as respect grows between poker players betting on a big hand, each of whom is uncertain whether his adversary is bluffing or holds the cards.

Bradshaw had Saleh placed on the litter and took a first aid kit from his saddle bag. With lancet and probe he worked for ten minutes, then rose with a flattened bullet and a rusty, doubled nail in his hand.

"I say! Can't teach Malays to load their muskets properly," he complained to Flynn. "If that gun had held just one bullet of the right caliber the women would be washing Saleh for burial. Proper old pirate he is, what?"

"And as it is?" Flynn queried. Saleh's death or recovery was an all-important factor in his course of action.

"I'm no Harley Street physician. Wish I were. I like the old robber," Bradshaw replied. "The wounds aren't deep, yet the lung is punctured."

He bent to put a compress on the wounds, then washed his hands in sea water at the edge of the beach.

"Take the Strong One to the village. Keep the flies from his face, and if he asks for opium give him a little," he ordered the Malays. To Flynn he said—

"Come along with me while I talk to Nagh Perba."

And leaving both his Sikhs behind Bradshaw turned up the beach toward the river trail Flynn had already traveled.

The American was sure they would encounter *haji* Mat's party on their way, but he reckoned without the astuteness of the wizened little pilgrim. They did meet twenty men, but not a weapon was visible.

Gravely the little Malay greeted the political officer and stepped off the path that the two white men might pass. Bradshaw chatted a minute, then passed on. When the party was far behind he turned to Flynn.

"Must have been an interestin' night," he remarked. "Wish I'd been along. Unofficially, of course. Bally shame to spoil sport, and piracy and slave hunting used to be the Malay notion of cricket. I've sat in the club a dozen times speculatin' about the *Lady Bristol* and whether Saleh Rahman did sink her. Sommers always swore he did, but none of us believed him. Guess we came out too late. Malays like Saleh and *haji* Mat aren't as common as they used to be. The *Lady Bristol* sinking is quite a story. You know it, of course."

"I'm a Yankee working for wages." Flynn grinned.

Briefly Bradshaw related the facts.

"That was in the troubles of '92," he finished. "The money was a bribe to keep an upcountry rajah quiet, and losin' it embarrassed the government no end. Probably why the case has never been forgotten. I'd like—" the bronzed face flushed slightly—"to settle it. Would give me quite a leg up in the service."

"Yeah?" said Flynn.

"I can get a government diver from Singapore, lose two weeks and have the commissioner down to handle the case

himself," said Bradshaw frankly. "Or I could use you—"

Flynn grinned.

"It would be a bally shame to spoil sport," he quoted softly.

"In a government case I won't stick at trifles—"

"Neither will I," Flynn promised. "Damn' fine climate you have in Malay, isn't it?"

"Quite," said Bradshaw, conceding that the subject was closed. "Er—I say. You're not really Smythe's partner?"

"No. Why?"

The Englishman looked relieved.

"I know Smythe and the *Rum Go*," he remarked negligently. "My district would be better off without him. If he wasn't a white man, Nagh Perba could keep him till he took root."

NOTHING of the personal judgment was manifest, however, in Bradshaw's manner as he approached the *kampong*. He crossed the rice fields by the main path, walking with an air that made Flynn forget the mud splashed on the white clothes. The land gate to the *kampong* was closed and barred. Above the eight-foot barrier of hewn planks twinkled the point of a spear; it was in the hands of a Malay who looked down at the political officer with an apologetic defiance. The brown face was amazed at its own daring, but resolved. When Bradshaw commanded him to open the gate he shook his head.

"We can't palaver. I'm going to jump over from your shoulder," whispered Bradshaw. "Don't follow me."

Flynn braced himself and cupped his hands against his knee. Bradshaw leaped from hand to shoulder, caught the top of the gate and vaulted over before the sentry could summon nerve to thrust. A man yelled inside the *kampong*. The sentry poked a face, entirely frightened now, over the gate.

"Open!" snapped Flynn, making peremptory signs, and was obeyed.

When the gate swung apart he caught sight of Bradshaw's straight back just disappearing into the *kampong*. Flynn followed—taking care to walk slowly. No man was in sight, but he could feel a hundred eyes upon him and sense the atmosphere of the place. Mingled fright and rebellion, uncertainty—a mood tricky and dangerous as gunpowder.

The American turned into the door of the *kampong* just as Bradshaw faced Nagh Perba in the great room inside the entrance. From the Malay's voice Flynn had judged him to be a small man. He was small. Jacket and trousers of light pink silk made him look like a monkey in costume. Small and close set eyes rolled, and over the emaciated yellow face spread a tint of green as Bradshaw strode toward him.

"You have an Englishman. Bring him here," Bradshaw said. There was no courteous preliminary.

"*Tuan*—" began Nagh Perba deprecatingly.

"*Tuan bilang!* The lord speaks!" thundered the political officer, and the little yellow man in the pink silk wilted.

Smythe was led into the hall. Enormous clumsy handcuffs of native manufacture encumbered his wrists, and in obedience to Bradshaw's look—an order was unnecessary—Nagh Perba drew out a key. As he unlocked the manacles Bradshaw held out his hand. Humbly, like a school boy, Nagh Perba extended them. Bradshaw snapped the locks on the thin yellow wrists.

So swiftly was the thing done that Nagh Perba was ironed before he realized what had happened. His jaw dropped and he uttered a strangled cry of horror. For the well born Malay the touch of manacles is as disgraceful as a blow; but though surprise and shame stupefied Nagh Perba, through the room echoed a low sound, part gasp, but more the growl of a mob angry, yet leaderless. Smythe's face went white.

"You have manacled a *tuan*. March!" Bradshaw snapped.

He took the Malay's arm, turned and marched for the outer door without a

backward look. Smythe, though white to the lips, caught Nagh Perba's other elbow and fell in step. As they retreated, from every open door Malays poured into the room. Step by step they advanced; a human tide damned by the invisible barrier of prestige. The growl became louder, deeper. Any second some one might shout a command, some hothead throw a knife.

Flynn made one long step inside the threshold. He at least could face the mob. Excitement burned him. He singled out every forward movement that thrust a Malay out of the mass, stared till that individual moved back. Ten seconds seemed like ten hours. Then the three passed him. He fell in behind.

Close together, grimly forcing themselves to walk without haste, the four crossed a stretch of hard packed earth that seemed endless, though it was less than forty feet in width, and passed out through the open gate.

Once in the open, Smythe wiped away the sweat that streamed from forehead and neck.

"Good God, was that necessary?" he burst out.

"Damn' salutary lesson," Bradshaw grunted. "I wouldn't do it again, though . . . I say, Yank, it's as well you opened that gate. If they'd seen us penned—"

"Yeah. Thanks for warning me to keep out," Flynn said.

Excitement still gripped him and kept his voice level. Both Smythe and Bradshaw glanced at him with admiration, and then the reaction struck all three. Had the Malays still followed, they would have taken to their heels, but the boldest of Nagh Perba's men were grouped around the gate and the space between widened at every step.

The hope of rescue deserted Nagh Perba. His face worked, and he slumped between the arms that held him erect, babbling in his shame like a drunken man.

"*Ya Allah! Ya Allah, tuan!* Thy servant was mad. Allah is wroth with thy servant, making him evil. Thy servant meant no harm to the Englishman, verily, *tuan*. He sent thee word swiftly, lest Saleh Rahman, the *chelaka*, steal thy gold. The ship is sunk south of the shoal, *tuan*. Thy servant will show the place for no reward, *tuan*. Five chests of the gold are there, *tuan*, one broken. Only free my wrists, *tuan*, and I will be thy eyes and ears. Saleh Rahman it was that led the boats and slew the *tuan* with the yellow beard. That *tuan* sank thy ship after it backed from the shoal. My father kept our men on the shore. They were not evil. I am not evil, *tuan*, only mad—"

"*Backed* from the shoal!" cried Bradshaw. "That's what we could never understand. Went aground and backed clear after they were attacked. No wonder Sommers couldn't find her! He knew she couldn't be boarded in the open sea. Thou knowest the spot?" he demanded of the abject Malay with a triumphant glance at Flynn.

"*Ya Allah, tuan,* the place, not the spot. None but Saleh Rahman knows where the ship went down. Before Saleh slew him, the *tuan* with the yellow beard made the water rise swiftly—"

"Then he was an engineer," said Bradshaw. "Saleh was burned that night. Sommers saw the weal forty years ago and I have seen the scar."

"Verity, *tuan!*" Nagh Perba chattered, more eagerly now that he saw the effect of his words. "In the engine room the *tuan* faced Saleh with a red hot bar. *Haji* Mat was there. It was he who told us the tale, for none of my village saw. It is the truth, *tuan*. Not one of us. We are faithful to the *raj*."

Bradshaw grunted contemptuously.

"Hearsay testimony, of course," he muttered, thinking aloud. "Still, checked by facts like that burn, and broken gold chest, and by men that can swear they saw Saleh put off from the beach. I say! It's goin' to be my painful duty to hang him yet."

"Why, he's dying, isn't he?" Flynn interrupted.

"Doubt it. Malays are hard to kill and he's one of the toughest. I've seen weaker men survive worse wounds," said Brad-

shaw, still preoccupied with his own thoughts. "Sorry it's necessary, of course. No malice after forty years; custom of the country at the time, almost, and all that. Still, we've got to prove that the *raj* can not be bested. Matter of prestige . . . Two weeks to get a diver—"

The coil was tight around old Saleh Rahman. For ten paces Flynn walked in silence, and when he spoke his words had a significance to him which was not the interpretation placed upon them by the other two white men.

"Under the circumstances," he declared, "I'm willing to dive myself."

VII

UNTIL the moment when Smythe was placing the diving helmet over Flynn's head the two had no opportunity to exchange a word. That Bradshaw did not trust the American entirely was obvious. He kept both white men by his side during the return to the village and while Nagh Perba was placed under the guard of Sikhs. The three had lunch together, and after they put out for the beach he made Smythe paddle while Flynn sat in the bow. The political officer was on the alert, yet under the rim of the helmet Smythe dared to whisper—

"Stall!"

That was already Flynn's intention. Thanks to the bearings obtained from Saleh, the *pakerangan* was anchored in the exact spot of the previous night. A buoy was placed, and then the diver descended on the weed grown deck. Working in half the time of his previous visit, he brought out the other two boxes. Gathering up the loose coins into a canvas sack brought for the purpose took some time because of the black clouds of rust thrown up, but it was accomplished long before Flynn felt any need of ascending. The water was warm and the pressure not great. He could have stayed on the bottom all the afternoon. When all the treasure was piled in the open he sat down upon it.

For a long time—how long he neither knew nor cared—he was motionless. Bright colored fish swam up to the copper helmet and poked their noses against the face glass. A stream of bubbles bobbed lazily upward like silver balloons while Flynn racked his brains, trying to be detective, lawyer and diver, to read the mind of Bradshaw, sitting in the boat which was a broad dark shadow overhead, and of that other diver, who might be sent down later. Any government diver could locate the strong room and find a few stray gold pieces. With a little trouble, the rusting hulk could be identified as that of the *Lady Bristol*, which would make out a case against Saleh. Nevertheless, Flynn did not believe the government would go to so much trouble to bring an old Malay to the bar for a crime forty years old. It was the treasure which was the hangman's rope. The gold could not be destroyed. It might be—lost.

From scattering the gold on the bottom Flynn recoiled. The oaken boxes were still strong, and even if he could succeed in breaking them open and tossing the coins over the side of the ship in handfuls, there was the chance that the gold would not be covered by drifting sand. Moreover, though such a step might save Saleh's life, it would doom him to an essential defeat, and the Strong One had shown no hesitation over risking his life for a point of honor far less near to him. In addition, a game is never lost until it is finished.

Flynn picked up a box, walked to the side of the ship, and with care—for a quick descent even of a dozen feet may cause a change of pressure which will squeeze a diver up into his helmet with fatal results—climbed down the side of the hulk on to the bottom. Twenty feet away from the hull he placed the box on the sandy bottom, and when after four trips all the gold was piled in one spot he scraped sand over the pile with hands and feet. Within an hour the tidal currents would erase the mark of human work. The treasure would become a sandy mound on the bottom, which no other diver would have reason to suspect.

The stratagem did not satisfy Flynn.

It was simply the best plan he could hit upon. He walked back to the ship and, when on deck, signaled for the ascent.

Bradshaw was staring at him quizzically when the helmet was removed.

"I found a room with the door broken down," said Flynn. "I went through her from end to end, every place a strong room should be. There's no gold. If that's the *Lady Bristol*, the pirates who sank her must have carried the treasure away."

"Interestin'," murmured Bradshaw suavely. "I say, your share'd be two thousand guineas, too. Ten thousand dollars. Sure you overlooked nothin'?"

"Damned sure. Get another diver if you like."

The bronzed Englishman leaned forward.

"Too bad you had to trail your life line behind you, Flynn," he said softly. "Livin' in the jungle, as I do, teaches a man to notice trifles. Twice you went *this* way, and four times, *that*. Might go down again, what? If you don't want the finder's share, another diver might. I'd tell him," said Bradshaw triumphantly, "to look for the gold on the right hand side of the ship!"

This was checkmate. Flynn had gambled on Bradshaw's lack of astuteness and the fact that a stranger watching a diver at work is usually fascinated by the bubbles rising to the surface. Well, he had lost. With an air of pity at the Englishman's inexperience he grinned.

"Suit yourself, Skipper," he answered resignedly. "I'll go down as often as you like, but right now I'm tired. It's nearly sunset, and besides, this is my second dive and I've been up all night."

From behind Flynn felt a nudge from Smythe. He dared not turn, but knew that the tall Englishman was delighted. Bradshaw, on the contrary, frowned, but he was forced to yield. He stepped to the stern and began to hoist the anchor.

"Both of you'll take dinner with me," he announced.

The beach was thronged with Malays when the *pakerangan* touched the shore and in the crowd Smythe lagged behind until Bradshaw stopped and called to him sharply. The long legged man apologized and joined the others at once. They went to the village, washed and settled down on cushions to await the evening meal.

Flynn, who was unused to sitting on the floor, was uncomfortable as well as ill at ease. Bradshaw was preoccupied, but Smythe talked steadily. His words were trivial—a mere account of his confinement at the *kampong*—but as he spoke his fingers twitched nervously, and though Bradshaw answered only in bored monosyllables the tall man kept hitching his cushion across the matting toward the political officer until they were knee to knee.

"Oh, quite so, quite so," said Bradshaw, lifting his head with annoyance.

TO THE point of the unguarded chin Smythe swung his fist. Though he was seated, the blow was a knockout. Bradshaw toppled sidewise, eyes glassy, and an expression of amazement frozen on his face. Smythe was on him like a wolf. One hand caught the bronzed throat, choking off any possible outcry. With the other, the tall Englishman caught the revolver from Bradshaw's belt and brought the butt down hard on the bare head, then crouched, gun in hand, facing the door.

The assault had been so swift and treacherous Flynn had not had time to move.

"Now you've played hell," he said.

Blood was flowing from Bradshaw's scalp, which relieved the American somewhat. At least the political officer had not been killed.

Smythe's answer was a snarl.

"I told Mat to tend to the Sikhs. We'll shoot them if he hasn't. Tie Bradshaw up," he commanded. "Take my orders, Yank, or—" the revolver shifted. "I just had time for a word on the beach, but if Mat hasn't blundered it's ours, Yank, ours!" The voice dropped to a whisper. "I know it's piled on the bottom. One dive, and then we'll slip across

the Straits in the *pakerangan*. I know the coast. There's hiding places we can stay ten years; Chinamen who'll pass us along till we can take a ship for Europe." The knuckles gripping the revolver whitened. "Damned English fool!" Smythe swore at Bradshaw's limp body. "Thinking no one would dare lay hands on him!"

Flynn used Bradshaw's belt to tie his hands, bound his head with a pair of handkerchiefs, then ripped the silk cover of a cushion into strips to secure the ankles.

"What happens to Bradshaw afterward?" he asked.

"Who the devil cares? We'll be across the Straits!" snarled Smythe. "Oh, I guess they'll let him go. Don't dare kill him. It's the Sikhs I'm afraid of."

The *kampong* was unnaturally silent. The sound of bare feet approaching the open door was distinctly audible, and the hammer of the revolver rose slightly under the involuntary pressure of Smythe's finger. The feet, however, were those of *haji* Mat. Wizened and grinning, he paused in the doorway, and the breath went out of Smythe's lungs in a long sigh.

"It is done, *tuan*," Mat reported. "The Sikhs will not trouble us. Nay, they are not harmed. No more than he," the old Malay went on, answering Flynn's unspoken question. With one bare toe the Malay touched Bradshaw's body. "Thou art a brave man, *tuan*," he muttered to Smythe, "and by Allah, so are we! We must remain in our village, bowing our heads before the *tuan* Bradshaw, who will be very angry. Yet meanwhile the *pakerangan* is ready. My brother and I will take the paddles."

Smythe shook his head.

"Nay, the *tuan* and I will go alone," he said. "With too many in the boat he can not dive, and first he needs rest and food."

The sun was setting. Before food could be eaten there would be no light save that of the stars, and the land breeze, blowing across the Straits, would enable one man to sail the *pakerangan* before the wind.

Mat turned a wizened and inscrutable face upon Flynn.

"Verily?" he demanded.

Knowledge of all these facts gave the question a sarcastic edge. He was deceived as little as Flynn himself as to Smythe's intentions.

"Aye, verily," repeated the American gravely. "And Saleh Rahman, how is he?"

"His wounds pain little. He speaks, and asks after thee," Mat grunted. "He is headman. I will tell him what you say —*tuans!*"

There was scorn, and challenge, in the tone with which Matt uttered the title of respect, but he backed out of the room with grave courtesy. The sound of his bare feet on the matting diminished and died away as he retreated.

Smythe swore under his breath.

"Have you guts to go through with it, Yank?" he challenged in a snarling whisper. "Let him suspect us! Once the money's aboard we'll hoist sail and shoot our way through any boats that try to stop us, eh?" The Englishman's tall body quivered and jerked with excitement.

Flynn, on the contrary, sat with muscles relaxed. Though his eyes were slightly narrowed, his grin had never been broader. The last level rays of the setting sun, shining through a chink in the thatched walls, fell upon his head, giving the curly red hair a gleaming life of its own.

"Yeah, he's wise," the American remarked. "You'll have to do all the fighting, buddy. Nothing's so helpless as a diver coming out of the water. I can just about climb the rope ladder into the boat alone, and what can I do wrapped up in a couple hundred pounds of lead and rubber after I get there, huh? I'd rather you chucked that getaway and took Mat aboard."

"If you were afraid of them, why didn't you dive while there was light?" Smythe sneered. "You're talking rot. We've taken the risks and are entitled to everything we can get."

"Are we? I thought there were rules, even in war and piracy. I want darkness as much as any one. The fewer who

know what becomes of that money, the better for all of us—but I'm wise, too, Smythe."

The close set gray eyes narrowed to pin points.

"You'll dive?"

"Of course I'll dive. We all lose if the money's left where it is," said Flynn.

VIII

OFFSHORE there was no light but that of the stars. Flynn had difficulty in finding the buoy which had been placed near the hulk; and to determine whether or not other boats had followed the *pakerangan* from the beach was impossible. Mat had made no effort to accompany the two white men. He had even kept the Malays from the beach. But for the single light burning ashore Smythe and Flynn might have been alone in midocean.

The American went over the side with an unusual amount of gear. Uncertain of what Smythe and the Malays intended, he was trusting to a trick of his trade. The ordinary diving procedure would have been to lash the boxes of coin together and hook on a rope lowered from above. Under the circumstances, however, Flynn had not wished to be under water when the specie rose above it, and therefore he carried down with him not only all the necessary equipment of ropes, lashings, and hooks, but also three bits of gear of which Smythe was ignorant—a coil of light cord, a small wooden buoy and tied to this a five pound bag of rock salt.

Flynn touched bottom near the hulk. At once he tied one of the heavy hoisting ropes to a projecting bit of iron, then walked along the bottom toward the gold. Here he lashed the boxes and bent on a second hoisting line. To the end of this second line he attached his buoy. Until the rock salt melted the buoy would remain below the surface. When it rose, it would make no sound; in the dark no man would be able to find a tiny piece of wood, the very existence of which he was ignorant. Until the coming of dawn the treasure was safe until Flynn wished to raise it.

He flashed his light over the coils of rope on the sand, making sure that everything was free for running. Then, holding the end of the rope tied to the hulk in his hand, he gave the signal to ascend. By Smythe's actions he would be able to judge of the Englishman's good faith.

Flynn's heart pounded as he was lifted upward. The dread that Smythe would shoot him when he passed over the rope touched him with icy fingers, and was gone. That was an unavoidable risk, but to reduce the danger Flynn held the rope under water when his helmet broke the surface of the sea. Through the thick lenses he could see nothing. He resisted Smythe's effort to help him over the side, and twisted his weighted shoes in the rungs of the rope ladder. When he could support himself without holding on by his hands, Flynn tapped his helmet, signaling Smythe to remove it.

The copper headpiece was removed with a vicious twist.

"What's wrong?" snarled Smythe in a whisper.

"Nothing, buddy! Here's the line," said Flynn.

The Englishman snatched the rope, flung himself into the bow of the *pakerangan*, far from Flynn, and commenced to haul in hand over hand. The rope came taut with a jerk. The boat rocked gently as Smythe tugged at an immovable weight.

"It's fouled!" he snarled.

"Help me off with the suit. Both of us can raise it," said Flynn cheerfully.

For a moment the silence was absolute.

"Like hell!" Smythe whispered.

Slowly he walked aft and bent over the side. The darkness was too intense for Flynn to follow his movements, but the cold circle of the revolver muzzle was suddenly in contact with the diver's forehead.

"Go down and free that line. D'ye hear me, Yank?" The whispered command rang with savage and malignant triumph. "I've stood your damn' grin and let you and a dirty old Malay laugh at

me. It's paid me. A crook of my finger now, or a slash at these ropes, and the whole thing is mine. Go down, Yank—and maybe when the gold's in the boat I'll let you aboard."

"Put on my helmet," said Flynn.

He tested the grip of his knees on the rope ladder. To put the helmet in place Smythe must use both hands and give a quarter turn to lock it to the neckpiece.

As the catch clicked Flynn's hands shot upward. He caught Smythe's elbows, and let himself fall backward as a gymnast drops from a trapeze to hang by the heels. His weight dragged Smythe out of the boat, and Flynn flung both arms around his body. Smythe's face was pressed against the heavy copper helmet. Flynn clung. Through the thick diving suit he could barely feel futile, ineffectual blows. For fifteen seconds Smythe struggled with the desperation of a drowning man. Then tortured lungs collapsed.

Flynn knew the instant at which Smythe breathed water. He felt the tensed body go limp. Instantly he released it, and before Smythe could sink or his own strength fail, threw every resource of sinew and nerve into one supreme effort to pull himself upright. The density of the water partially counterbalanced the burden of helmet and chest weights. Flynn clutched the ladder, lifted himself out of water and blindly groped till his fingers closed in Smythe's hair. Heaving the half drowned man across the gunwale, the diver struggled up the ladder inch by inch and tumbled head first into the bottom of the *pakerangan*.

HE COULD not remove his own helmet. He could not see. Gropingly he lifted Smythe, held him head downward and the water ran out of his mouth, tied his feet together, and then rolled him roughly across a thwart until he began to struggle. Pressing his helmeted head against the Englishman's face, Flynn motioned him to release the locking stud at the back of the neck. Smythe obeyed, and Flynn could then twist the helmet off and breathe fresh air. He had little fear of an attack. A man so nearly drowned does not recover at once. Smythe was retching and groaning. He made no resistance when Flynn caught his hands and tied them behind his back.

First Flynn satisfied himself that the revolver had gone overboard in the struggle. Then he removed his suit, with considerable difficulty, and settled down to wait. That there were no signs of other boats seemed strange to him. The night itself seemed to hold its breath, and the minutes dragged.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Smythe humbly, after a long silence.

"Dunno," said Flynn.

Nor did he. When he judged that a half-hour had elapsed, he snapped on his diving light and sent a beam around the boat. He located the little buoy bobbing nearby, but no sign of other craft. Slowly he pulled up the anchors of the *pakerangan*, paddled to the buoy, and hauled in the light cord, the heavy rope, and the gold. To get the four boxes over the gunwale took all his strength. They fell to the bottom with a thump that echoed like thunder in the stillness, and still, despite the light and noise, the *pakerangan* seemed to be alone.

Flynn was tempted to hoist the sail and head across the Straits. Neither fear of ambush nor the long arm of the British law restrained him. His desire was to do the sporting thing. For the gold to disappear would help old Saleh Rahman, but yet Flynn could not force himself to vanish into the darkness—like a thief. Instead he paddled slowly to the beach.

A dozen figures materialized out of the darkness as the bow grated on the sand. *Haji* Mat was in the forefront of the crowd. He drew the boat farther on to the sand and bent his wizened face to peer through the gloom.

"You are back, *tuan?*" he called wonderingly.

"Aye. Saleh Rahman must see his gold," said Flynn.

From the Malays around there was the hiss of indrawn breaths; guttural cries as

they swarmed into the boat and found Smythe bound.

Flynn walked straight up the beach toward the village. Behind him the Malays bore the treasure; *Haji* Mat followed at his heels in silence until they entered the room where Saleh lay, his giant body bare, a crimson *sarong* thrown across his legs. The old man's deep set eyes glowed at the sight of the dripping boxes.

"You decide what to do with it. I can't throw it away, or steal it," said Flynn.

"Lift me up!" cried Saleh. His huge arm shot out, catching Flynn by the wrist, and with his help the old Malay tottered to his feet and stood leaning on the American's shoulder. "And now send for Nagh Perba!"

A smile appeared upon Saleh's wrinkled face when his rival was brought before him, still in handcuffs. Though he spoke in Malay, the white men could sense triumph and eloquence in the voice that boomed through the thatch walls. For forty years Saleh had dreamed of this moment, and no wounds or pain could lessen its savor.

"Woman thou art, Nagh Perba! Woman and fool, with thy craft and lies! There is the gold thy father feared to take. He laughed when I swore I would hire *tuans* who would rub soot in his face. Are thou laughing, Nagh Perba? Half thy father would take for keeping my neck out of the English rope," Saleh gloated. "Does thou demand half? When thou art in jail picking oakum remember the gold thou sawest on my floor, and thy folly in setting thyself against me. The tiger does not share with the serpent, but one gold piece thou mayest have—to buy betel nut in the jail when the days are long. Wilt thou thank me, Nagh Perba?"

"Thou wilt free my hands?" whined the little man.

"Nay, I fear the justice of the *raj*," said Saleh mockingly. "Greatly thou hast offended. Take thy gold piece and begone."

With his toe Saleh slid a coin across the matting and laughed aloud when Nagh Perba bent and clutched it greedily.

"*Ya Allah*, that leaves my liver warm!" Saleh chuckled when his rival had been dragged away. "When one is old, to make good the boasts of one's hot youth is good. But now—" the wrinkled face clouded. The grizzled head bent to stare at the four water soaked boxes, and the coins which had spilled from the canvas bag across the matting. "When I was young, I could have taken this and become a great lord at some rajah's court," Saleh muttered. "But now, I know not. When *haji* Mat came to me crying that you wished to dive alone, I said it is the will of Allah. The gold is *tuan's* gold. Let the *tuans* bear it where they will, sparing our village from the wrath of the *raj*. But now—shall we hide it in the forest, or sink it in the sea?"

"It is yours," Flynn said.

Saleh shook his head. There was sorrow in his voice.

"Nay, I am headman of this village. If I take the gold, I will be a hunted man, living among strangers who will do me no honor and think my story is a lie. If I divide it among all, the men will leave their women and the village, and only those who become penniless quickly will return. To hide it would be the act of Nagh Perba, whom I hate, but what else is there to do? It's *tuan's* gold."

"You're asking me?" said Flynn. "You are? Then give the gold to Bradshaw—the gift of Saleh Rahman to the *raj*. Bradshaw wouldn't punish your village or rake up old crimes against you. He couldn't; it wouldn't be the sporting thing to do."

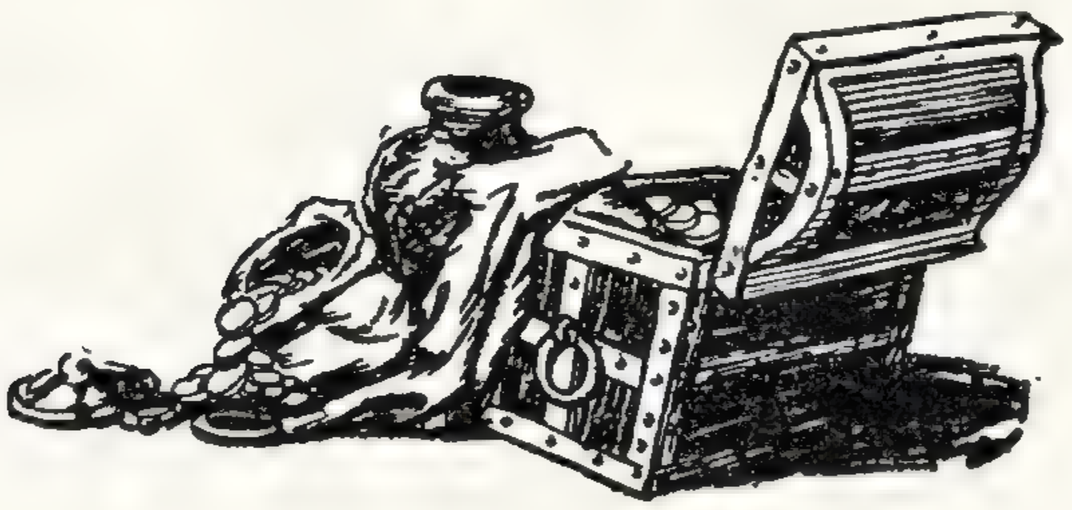
"The gift of Saleh Rahman to the *raj*," the old Malay repeated softly. "*Ya Allah*, *tuan*, thou are wise! The times are changed, and the old days gone, but to have won the gold, kept it, snatched it from beneath their noses, and then give it back from equal to equal, as friends pay a wager after a game! That will do me honor! But you, *tuan?* Where is your reward?"

Flynn grinned at the old Malay.

"Was it the gold you wanted yourself, or the fun of getting it?" he demanded. "Don't worry; I've gotten what I came for!"

Still smiling, Flynn turned away. He wanted to be the one to cut Bradshaw's bonds. He had no doubt of the outcome. Bradshaw was a good sport, and the gift of the gold would rebound to the prestige of his government. The pardoning of Saleh would be a graceful gesture. The *raj* is not revengeful, or petty.

Flynn was tired. The struggle against treachery and greed, danger, toil, and suspense, had all taken their toll. Sordid things, some of them, yet through the welter of events ran the stream of clean, brave sportsmanship. No one would ever hear of the affair. There would be a report in some government file, a legend in a few Malay villages, no more. To save the face of an old Malay and of a nervy Englishman might be no great matter, and yet, after ten years of wandering, Flynn was content. All in all, this was something to write home about.



ONE WAY TICKET

By WILLIAM FORT

A Story of the Racketeers

WAS this what it felt like to kill a man?

Barney O'Malley jabbed the spade, so recently used to dispense death, into the ground, and squinted down through the half gloom of the forest at Joe Keltzo, whom he had just murdered.

Murderers should feel remorse, terror, fear. Yet the only sensation Barney had was one of intense relief that this man who lay so quiet was now powerless to interfere further with his life; powerless to make him commit other murders, other crimes engineered for Keltzo's profit. Big Joe Keltzo had been a rat, and therefore deserved to die.

Barney squared his hunched shoulders, stretched himself to his full five feet seven inches of height and looked about him, much as young David must have done after he had slain Goliath. For, though he did not recognize them as such, the feelings within Barney O'Malley's breast at that moment were those of a conqueror; feelings of self-praise for a good deed well done.

Breathing hard, he leaned for a moment against a tree. He had plenty of time. There was not, so far as Barney knew, a living soul within twenty miles. Not a single soul but his own, and this huge, inanimate bulk slumped at his feet,

its head hanging over the brink of a black hole in the ground, arms outstretched, as a man might lie who had thrown himself beside a woodland brook to quench his thirst. All about him were trees—rows and rows of them, marching in endless procession like a scraggly army, up and down the hills of this desolate country which he had selected for the murder. It was raining, a gentle rain that pattered caressingly upon the leaves overhead.

Barney was standing beneath a large maple that rose from the bottom of a little valley to spread its branches in dignified hauteur above the clumps of scrub oak which rimmed the yawning aperture at its feet. Some shrill voiced bird screamed. Barney looked up with a scowl.

"Yip your damn head off!" he growled. "Nobody'll hear you!" He spat on his hands and proceeded to enlarge the hole to a size which would accommodate a six-foot body.

The rain was falling more quickly now. Mingling with his sweat, it changed the color of his shirt from a faded blue to a deep indigo. It ran in little rivers from his bent head and dripped from the end of his nose. The spade made a little sucking noise as it sank into the softened earth, almost like an echo of Barney's own grunts of effort.

His grave digging task completed, Barney leaned again on the spade handle and rested, contemplating the body of Big Joe for the few seconds it took him to light a cigaret; then he spat contemptuously, and grinned.

"That for you, louse!" he muttered.

His glance shifted to a spot on the far side of the new grave where two rusty, square tin boxes lay on the grass. His eyes alight with greed, he stepped across the hole and, bending over, jerked at the weather rotted cord which had been used to hold down the tops of the boxes. The cord snapped easily, and out upon the grass tumbled bundles and bundles of currency—tens, twenties, fifties, and one packet that bore the numerals 1000 in their corner. Trembling a little, Barney knelt on the rain soaked weeds and fingered the bills almost reverently. These meant luxury—twenty-five cent cigars, hundred dollar suits of clothes, three or four pairs of shoes at a time, an automobile, silk dresses for his girl—any damn thing he wanted for the rest of his life.

"Two hundred and fifty grand!" he mumbled. His hands shook. He picked up a handful of the bills and twisted around on his knees. His lips were trembling and a little stream of tobacco juice trickled down one corner of his mouth.

"I'm rich, Joe!"

He shook the money at the motionless figure on the ground, and laughed hysterically.

"Rich! And you, you lousy rat, you're dead! And you can't do a damn' thing about it!"

Very slowly then he packed the bundles into the box again and closed the cover. When he rose to his feet he was smiling. Not so much at the riches which he now possessed, but at that other thought: Joe was dead, and he, Barney O'Malley, was free to do as he pleased!

Using the spade as a lever—for Joe was heavy—Barney dumped him into the shallow hole and grinned with satisfaction as the body hit the bottom with a thud. As a final salutation he patted Joe's upturned face with the spade, none too gently, then set methodically to work packing in the loose earth around him. It did not occur to Barney that this burying process was unnecessary, that the mound which he would leave behind would be more conspicuous than the body of a man covered with leaves and grass. It simply seemed to him the thing to do. Or probably it was his hatred and fear of the man while alive that prompted him now to pack him away as further evidence to himself that Keltzo was dead.

For six months, now, Barney had hated Joe Keltzo. Ever since a night the winter before when chance had swept him within the power of the other man.

WITHIN the shelter of a doorway in an apartment building on Chicago's near North Side, Barney had been bidding his girl good night. He laughed, slightly embarrassed, as Nora insisted on making sure that his overcoat was buttoned snugly about his throat.

"You'd think I was a little kid or something."

He put his arms around her for a good night kiss—and felt her suddenly stiffen in his arms. She pushed him away, her hand feeling a bulge under his coat at the shoulder, her eyes seeking his accusingly.

"Barney—" her voice was horrified—"what is that? Barney, you're not—"

"Never mind."

Barney tried to capture her hands, but she eluded him and felt again, more closely, that telltale bump.

"A gun!" she exclaimed. "I knew it was! You—carrying a gun!" She clutched his arm and as she looked up there was surprise and doubt and wonder in her eyes.

"Listen, sweetie—" Barney shifted uneasily and tried to avoid that look—"that don't mean a thing, see? Not a thing. There's been a lot of holdups lately, and I knew I'd be out late; so I just brought it along." It sounded silly and he knew it.

"Since when—" and Nora asked the question with all the scorn of which a black eyed Irish girl is capable,—"since when, Barney O'Malley, did you have to carry a gun to protect yourself? Ain't you got two fists? You!"

She shook his big right arm with her two hands and refused to listen when he tried to interrupt. He might as well have tried to offer a drowning man a drink of water.

"Holdups you're afraid of! Don't tell *me!* It's that no-account Jim Clancy that's been talking to you. Getting you into that dirty bootleg outfit he goes with. Telling you, I suppose, what a fool you are to be working honest, and bragging about how much he makes. Oh, I could kill him!"

She threw herself into his arms, sobbing. Uneasy and ashamed, he patted her head.

"Now, now. Don't, Nora. I won't—I'll put it away tonight when I get home. And I won't ever carry it again. How's that, kid? Hell, baby, I just wanted to get some money together quick, that's all. Don't, now. You mean more than all the money there is, Nora. I'll do anything you say. Honest I will."

"Why did you listen to Jim Clancy then?" she asked, her voice muffled in his coat collar.

"Listen, baby—" Barney hesitated, stroking her hair—"I—I love you, kid. I sure do. And here I am, driving a truck, see? I don't want you to be the wife of a truck driver, sweetie. And when Jim tells me how I could be making as much in a day driving for their outfit as I do now in a week, I says to myself, I'll do it. Just till I get enough money to start us up good in the trucking business of our own—Nora's and mine—and then quit. That's all, kid, see? I wanted my own business. So then we could get married quick and I could have money to buy you things. But—it's out, baby. It's all off. I'll tell him so, see?"

Nora mumbled something into his shoulder that sounded like "darling." Then, with the perversity of her sex, she looked up, her eyes blazing with anger through the tears.

"Carry a gun if you want to!" she exclaimed. "Go with Jim Clancy if you like him so much. It doesn't mean a thing to me. I hate you! And I never want to see you again!"

With a little sob she jerked away from him and fled up the stairs, slamming the inner door behind her.

Barney stood for a moment where Nora had left him. Then, half angry and half ashamed, he stepped out the door into the cold. It had sounded like a pretty good thing at the time, that proposition of Clancy's.

"C'mon," Jim had urged him. "Don't be a sap! Meet Big Joe an' talk it over, anyhow. That won't cost you nothin'."

So Barney had agreed, and Jim was to

pick him up tonight and take him to talk things over with Big Joe Keltzo, the boss of the outfit. But now, with the memory of Nora's tears fresh in his mind, somehow the idea didn't look so hot, although the idea of making a lot of money quick still appealed to him. If she'd rather marry a truck driver than have a lot of money, all right. Girls were funny, anyhow.

And if it hadn't been for that gun she'd never have known a thing about it. It had lain in the bottom of his trunk for six years—ever since he had swiped it from the Army the day he was discharged. But tonight, going to meet a gangster boss, it had looked to him like the thing to do to carry it. He did not want to have them think he was soft.

AN AUTOMOBILE rolling slowly toward him half a block down the street reminded him that Jim had promised to pick him up at Clark Street and Chicago Avenue at half past twelve. It was almost that now. It would not be right to keep Jim waiting around in weather like this. He would meet him and just say the deal was off. So thinking, Barney tucked his chin into his coat collar and leaned against the wind and rain as he stepped off down the street.

It was past midnight. A chill wind from off the lake swept through the empty streets, driving before it a cold drizzle, half rain, half sleet, that spattered angrily against the darkened windows and covered the pavements with a slippery, fast-thickening blanket. Barney paused under a street light at the corner to look for a taxi.

As he did so a gun barked twice. A bullet tipped his ear and the automobile which had been creeping along unnoticed behind him suddenly spurted forward. It was the first time he had been shot at for more than six years, but instinctively Barney threw himself flat on the ground. Perhaps it was the old Army instinct, also, that caused him, as he hit the pavement, to have that old Service pistol of his in his hand, ready for use. Through the rain and sleet he made out a man standing on the running board of the car. Three more shots seemed to miss him by inches. Barney raised his gun and fired just as the car, gaining speed, jerked sharply around the corner. He saw the man fall to the street, roll over twice in the slush and lie still. The car did not stop.

For a long five seconds Barney lay where he was. Then, confused and frightened, he stumbled to his feet and hurried to where the man was lying, a trickle of blood spreading about his head. He was dead. Panic seized him. He looked around wildly. A murderer! He did not stop to wonder who had tried to kill him. They must have mistaken him for somebody else. But what did it matter? All he could think was that he, Barney O'Malley, had killed a man. He saw himself in the electric chair, Nora lost to him forever. A murderer! His throat went dry. He could not swallow. He gazed down in horror at the form lying there in the muck of the street, then at the gun still in his hand.

"Damn' you!" he said, and raised his arm to throw it away. But some instinct of caution caused him instead to replace it in the holster.

A window in the building on the corner was thrown open and a voice demanded to know what was the trouble. Lights were snapped on in other apartments. Barney tried to run, but his feet were like lead. He tripped, sprawled flat on the sidewalk, stumbled again to his feet and ran on. Behind him he heard the hysterical scream of a woman. What would Nora say? And it had not been his fault! He looked back. He had run only half a block. Frantic, Barney headed across the street toward an unlighted apartment vestibule which seemed to offer temporary safety, but he had only reached the middle of the street when a low closed car, with a screech of brakes, skidded to a stop not three feet from him.

"Hey!"

The driver's head leaned out the lowered window of the sedan. With a gasp

of relief, Barney saw that it was Jim Clancy.

"Hop in, kid." Jim grinned at him through the rain.

The car's rear door swung open and Barney literally threw himself inside. A big hand reached over the back of the front seat and slammed the door behind him. The car leaped away, scarcely slackening speed as it rounded the next corner and raced westward with total disregard of danger. Exhausted from worry and fright, Barney sank back on the cushions.

Dully he noted that, beside Jim, there was another person in the front seat—a huge man whose head barely cleared the top of the car and whose bulk completely filled the space between the steering wheel and the other side of the machine. Shifting his position with evident difficulty, this person now turned slightly sidewise and looked back at Barney, then resumed his former position without speaking.

"There's enough cars along here," he said to Clancy. "You can slow up some. Get over to Halsted and turn north."

He seemed to have lost all interest in Barney. Although in the almost absolute darkness of the car he could make out nothing of the big man but the outline of his head and shoulders, Barney felt an instinctive dislike for the fellow. And the silence, the tension, made him uneasy. It was ten minutes before Clancy, driving slowly along a well lighted street, turned his head and spoke.

"Lucky we come along when we did, wasn't it? What was the row? Say, meet Joe Keltzo, Barney. This here's Barney O'Malley I was tellin' you about, boss," he added to the big fellow, jerking his head in the direction of the rear seat.

"Pleased to meetcha," Keltzo rumbled in a deep voice.

He continued to stare ahead and did not turn his head.

"Well, what was the row?" Jim said again.

The sound of a friendly voice caused much of Barney's panic to disappear. He did not stop to question how Jim Clancy and the car happened to be driving past just at that time. He told them how the strange car had pulled alongside him; how he had thrown himself on the ground, shot back at the man on the running board and killed him. Clancy and Keltzo exchanged a swift glance at that, but Barney did not notice.

"I ran up to him," Barney went on, "and he was dead. And now they'll get me for murder." All his fear came back to him again. "Jim, it wasn't my fault! But how could I prove that?" He waited in tense silence for an answer.

"Leave it to us, kid," Clancy said, at last. "We stick by our friends, don't we, Joe?"

"Yeah." Keltzo's voice, however, held little enthusiasm.

"You mean," Barney asked eagerly, "you'll help me out of this?"

"Why not?" said Jim cheerily, and Keltzo nodded slow agreement. "We'll go have a drink and talk this over. Where to, boss?"

"Howard's," Keltzo mumbled.

FIVE minutes later Clancy parked the car in front of a café above which an electric sign that read "Howard's" blinked on and off. An awning stretched from the entrance to the curb and a liveried doorman was in attendance on the sidewalk.

They walked through a maze of crowded tables, through a door at the far end into a small room at the rear. Keltzo entered first, switching on the light. A table stood in the center, and there were five or six straight backed chairs scattered about. Otherwise the room was barren of furniture.

"Take off your coats," Keltzo said.

He removed his own and tossed it over a chair, then sat down behind the table, towering above it like a giant. He looked across at Barney and Jim, watching them out of heavy lidded eyes which bulged from their sockets like two round marbles. His head was grotesque in its massiveness, with large ears and a double chin that bellied out over the collar of his soft

shirt. He motioned them to chairs. A waiter came in noiselessly, deposited a tray containing a whisky bottle and three glasses and raised one eyebrow expressively at Keltzo.

"I'm busy, Ed," Keltzo said; then, "Now, what's all this about?" he asked as the waiter disappeared. He poured out three drinks, looking meanwhile at Barney with a frown. "All right—help yourself. Here's how!" He gulped his own drink and continued to fix Barney with his stare. "Murder ain't so good for the nerves, is it?"

Keltzo's voice was as soft as the purr of a cat. Barney choked on his drink.

"It wasn't murder!" Barney said wildly. "I'm telling you, it happened just like I said. I never saw the guy in my life before. I was walkin' along—"

"All right, but. That's all right. You don't need to worry none. Jim an' me, we ain't tellin' anybody— Have another drink." He surveyed Barney appraisingly, noting the thick stocky build, the firm jaw and the good natured eyes, and laughed goodnaturedly, his thick lips parting broadly above stained teeth. "Have another drink," he repeated, shoving the bottle toward Barney. "I told you, I ain't tellin' a soul, see? Get that? Right. Now Jim, here, says you want to join up with us. That right?"

"Sure it's right, ain't it, Barney?" Jim put in. "Barney's a good egg, boss," he went on in a confidential tone.

Barney slid down farther on his chair.

"What mob you workin' with now?" Keltzo asked.

"Nobody," Barney said. "I'm drivin' a truck."

"Yeah?" Keltzo was skeptical. "Then lemme tell you somethin', kid. That was Jack Anselmi you bumped off tonight. Ed, the waiter, just told me. Now, how'd it happen, if you ain't runnin' with anybody, that Anselmi picks on you for a target?"

He winked at Jim and grinned across the table at Barney with a sneer.

His tone angered Barney. He forgot for a moment that he had anything to fear, and his fists clenched. Who was this Keltzo, anyway? He stood up, his eyes blazing.

"I don't give a damn who he was, and I don't know why he tried to kill me," he said. "I never heard of him, and I never heard of you either, see? I never worked with any mob, as you call it, an' as for you and your lousy outfit—you can all go to hell!"

He walked over and picked up his coat, but Jim grabbed him by the arm.

"He didn't mean nothin'," Jim said. "Wait a second, pal. That's just Joe's way, see? He's all right. He's a good square guy. Now you wait a minute. Let's talk this over."

"Lemme alone!" Barney jerked his arm free and took up his coat. "Maybe he's all right, but I don't like 'im. I'm gettin' out of here."

"Wait awhile, kid," Keltzo's voice cut in sharply. "Wait awhile before you walk out on us. You might as well sit down, kid, because you don't get outa here unless I say so, see?"

Barney turned with a scowl, then dropped again into the chair.

"Now," Keltzo went on, "we was pretty good to you tonight. You'd been pretty bad off if we hadn't come along, kid." The words brought Barney back to normal. He had almost forgotten he had killed a man. "Now, like I said, we ain't sayin' a word but—" he held up a pudgy hand when Barney started to interrupt—"get this, lad. That killing tonight was murder, if I say so!" His voice suddenly had become a snarl. "It's any damn thing I say it was. I saw you. Anselmi come along. You was walkin' in the same street. When he come to the corner an' pulls a rod you let 'im have it an' then run! Hell," he sneered, "there ain't a jury in the country wouldn't convict you!"

With a quickness that was surprising in one of his size, Keltzo rose from the table and leveled a thick finger under Barney's nose.

"I saw it, see? An' Jim, here, saw it. An' we can swear to any damn thing we

please an' get away with it! All I have to do is hand you over to the cops. You'll go to the chair an' I'll be in right with 'em for the rest of my life."

WHAT Keltzo said sounded logical enough to Barney. He moistened his lips nervously.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked finally. His lips were dry, his voice no more than a whisper.

"That's more like it," Keltzo said with a laugh. He sat down again at the table.

"I told you he wanted to come in with us." Jim was grinning too, and winked at Keltzo.

"Now, Jim," Keltzo said, "you run along for awhile. Your pal here and me—we got things to talk about. We'll get along fine." His huge head resting on his cupped hand, Keltzo sat regarding Barney for some moments after Jim had gone. "You'll do," he said then. "You got guts." Barney looked up, distrustful. "Come up close to the table," the big man went on. "I don't want nobody else to hear this—I got a job for you, lad, an' there ain't nothing crooked about it. What d'ya know about that?"

Big Joe leaned over close and his voice became a low rumble. He placed a heavy hand on Barney's arm as he talked.

"There's a fortune, see—an' we split it two ways. Two hunderd an' fifty grand—cash. It's buried up in Wisconsin somewhere, an' the guys that put it there—they're in jail, see?"

"No," said Barney. "I don't get you at all."

Joe leaned still farther over the table.

"The Roundout robbery!" he croaked. "The mail train stickup—two million they got, kid. The dicks got it all back but the two hunderd and fifty grand that's tucked away in Wisconsin. Now, that don't belong to nobody, see? The guys that stole it are in jail. So are the two birds that put it where it is now—that is, one of 'em. The other one's dead. Now, if you an' me knew where that was, an' if we went up there and dug it up, it'd be ours, wouldn't it? Well, I know how to find out where it is."

"Yeh?" Barney was interested in spite of himself.

"These guys made a map of where it's hid, see? Never mind, now, how I know. I know, an' that's enough, ain't it? Two of 'em buried it. One of 'em's dead. The other one's in jail. But before he went, he give this map to his girl, see? To keep for him. The stunt was, these two guys go up an' put this stuff away so, whatever happens, there'll always be a bunch of jack for 'em when they gets out of jail—if they get caught. The two of 'em was sent together, see, so there wouldn't be no doublecross. But hell! Blackie Dugan, the boy who went up with Dago Moore to bury it, he was killed before he got back to town. They knew Dago did it, but they couldn't prove nothing. So they laid for Dago Moore. They got to him, all right, but before they could make him spill anything about where the money was hid, the Federal dicks grabbed the whole mob. An' Dago'd already give this map to his girl. Get it, kid? Now what d'ya say? Is that a good job or ain't it?"

"How do you know all this?" Barney wanted to know. "And if the dame knows where it is, why don't she get somebody herself and go after it?"

Big Joe smiled queerly. He squeezed Barney's arm knowingly and winked.

"Because," he said slowly, "Lou's my woman now—an' she does what I say, see?"

Those words, somehow, gave Barney a panicky feeling inside him. He felt, rather than saw, the evil that possessed this other man. He avoided his eyes and groped around blindly for some excuse. He wished he was out of this mess.

"It—it sounds fishy to me," he said lamely, but with as much gruffness as he could muster. "Anyhow, why pick me out for a lot of easy money like this? Why not take one of your own gang? You don't even know me."

Big Joe grinned again, leaned back in his chair and gave Barney a flattering smile.

"Didn't I say you was smart? Why let you in, eh? That's a good one. All right, I'll tell you. Because there ain't a guy in the mob I can trust like I can you, see? You're a good boy, lad—" Then as suddenly his manner changed again, his voice hard. "What the hell?" he snarled. "It's none of your business, that ain't." He fixed Barney with an intent stare as he finished, speaking slowly, "I know damn well you'd rather do as I say than go to the chair—for murder!"

Barney went cold under the look of those hard eyes. Again what Keltzo said sounded logical, and he saw no escape.

"All right," he mumbled.

He felt very miserable and very much alone. Before he could say anything further Jim stuck his head through the door.

"What d'ya say, boss?"

Joe motioned for him to come in.

"Everything's fine," he boomed. "Barney's just signed up—ain't you, Barney?"

"Yeh," said Barney. "I suppose so."

"That's great." Jim slapped him on the back. "Let's have a little drink on that."

He poured out three brimming shots of whisky, took one himself and passed the other two.

THUS it had been that Barney's servitude commenced. Confused, afraid and imagining himself in the shadow of the electric chair, he sat glumly in that rear room of the cabaret and listened to his future being planned for him. Through a crack in the door came the wailing blare of the orchestra. A drunk was yelling the chorus, and there was applause and laughter. A gangster, now; Nora lost to him. But what else could he do?

"Here's how," said Jim.

"How," Big Joe muttered, and leered knowingly at Barney.

Barney downed his drink and wished he were home. His dislike of the big man was growing. But he stayed with Joe that night, sharing a lavish apartment above the cabaret.

"You'll be safe, here," Joe explained. But Barney had a hunch it was because Joe did not want to allow him out of his sight. However, again there was nothing he could do about it.

He lay awake most of the night, going over and over again the nightmare events which had led up to his strange partnership with Big Joe Keltzo. He tried to figure who could have tried to kill him? Who was Anselmi, and why should he have had a grudge against an unknown like Barney O'Malley? And Keltzo—why had Keltzo chosen him, a stranger, as a partner? If there was that much money, and if they found it, would Joe keep his promise and give him a share of it? More likely he'd try to murder him and keep it all, Barney decided. He'd get his share, though! He'd have his own trucking business after all. And if it was stolen money, and if he and Joe found it, they sort of had a right to it, hadn't they? He fell asleep finally, feeling very sorry for himself, and with all of his questions unanswered.

Thus it was that two nights later found Barney and Big Joe riding southwest to the outskirts of Chicago in a fast, low hung coupé. It was a black night and bitterly cold. Barney, hunched over the wheel, sat silent, watching the fingers of light that reached forward into the darkness from the headlights as the car jounced slowly over an unpaved, unlighted street. He ducked his head against the wind and listened to what Big Joe was saying. One big arm sprawled along the back of the seat, Joe leaned close to make himself heard above the wind, his wheezing breath blowing hot on Barney's neck as he talked.

"An' I been waitin' for months. Waitin' till I could find somebody like you I could trust, see?"

"Yeah." Barney knew Joe was a liar, but he did not say so.

"All you gotta do," Joe went on, "is keep this gal quiet, see? While I prowl the joint. That is, if she won't give me the map. But—" he laughed grimly—"I think she'll give it to me."

"Yeah," Barney said again. "I wish I knew more about this."

"Never mind!" Big Joe laughed maliciously. "You'll know plenty before we're done. There's the house. Stop this side and douse the lights. She ought to be alone, but you never can tell."

Barney brought the car to a jerking stop and switched off the lights.

"Now do like I told you," Joe went on. "Knock on the door an' when she opens it you say you're lost an' you wanta know where you're at. That's the sign see, for the other gang she used to belong to, to get in. I'll be right behind you in a couple of minutes, an' we'll get what we want."

"Maybe she won't give it to you," Barney suggested.

"Don't worry none about that."

Barney climbed out of the car and made for the house which was nothing more than a shanty; a decrepit shack that once had been a farm house. A single light shone dimly from a small front window, downstairs. He walked to the door and knocked.

"What do you want?" A woman's voice, cold and hostile, asked the question almost immediately from upstairs. Barney followed the formula that had been given to him.

"Please ma'am, I've lost my way. I want to know where I am."

"All right," the voice said after a pause.

He heard a window close and a moment later the door was opened cautiously, wide enough for him to slip through, and the same voice bade him to come in.

HE EYED his grudging hostess curiously. Instead of the oldish woman he had expected, here was a young girl, slim and rather pretty and, as she stood there watching him closely out of hard, black eyes, she reminded him somewhat of Nora. Barney felt a sudden stab of unhappiness. What would Nora think if she could see him now?

"You're a phony," the girl said in a low voice. "What do you want?"

Barney started to reply but could think of nothing to say. He experienced a sudden feeling of revolt against Joe. This was not his game, this slimy business he had allowed himself to be dragged into. Why should he go on with something he did not know about? He sensed tragedy of some sort—ill fortune—a hunch of bad luck in the air. And he knew, somehow, that from that moment it was to be a fight between himself and Big Joe—for freedom. He started to act on this hunch, to warn this girl, but there was no time. The door behind him swung open and Big Joe thrust his huge bulk into the room, entering ponderously, almost filling the doorway.

At sight of the girl Joe's eyes narrowed. Very slowly, taking no notice of Barney, he advanced toward her. To Barney, as he watched, it was like a continuation of the nightmare he had been living since the evening before, with Big Joe looming in the half light of the room like a huge monster from whom there was no escape—a bullying devil advancing like an animal toward its prey. The girl screamed. The sound galvanized Barney into action. Now was the time to get out of this, before things got any thicker. He pulled his gun and leveled it at Big Joe.

"Stick 'em up, you!" he growled.

Joe's only answer was a snarl. He reached forth a long arm, grasped the girl by the wrist and jerked her to him. She raised her other hand, until now hidden behind her, and disclosed a pistol. With a slap of a huge paw, Joe knocked it loose and it fell with a clatter upon the floor in the corner. Barney took aim at Joe's broad back and pulled the trigger. But nothing happened; only a sharp click as the hammer was released. Joe must have unloaded the gun during the night. Joe heard that click and laughed.

"Thought I was a fool, did you?" he jeered. "C'mon—" this to the girl—"gimme that letter, Lou! You know damn well that's what I'm after. I told you I'd come! Where is it?"

"No!" she cried. "No!"

With a growl of rage Joe twisted her arm and she fell to the floor.

"C'mon!" he snarled. "Where is it? Damn you, where is it?"

As Joe forced her to the floor, Barney bounded across the room and threw himself at the gorilla-like body. He raised the empty pistol as a club, but with a sweep of his free arm Joe sent him crashing back. He tripped over a chair, his head struck the floor with an echoing bump and he lay still, dazed. The girl screamed again and Joe, reaching down, caught her by the throat and stopped her cries. When Barney raised himself from the floor and saw her at the other side of the room, something about the way she lay there, quiet and still, told him she was dead. He staggered to his feet and bent over her, then looked up, horror in his eyes.

"Jees!" he said. "You've killed her!"

Standing before a wall cabinet, pulling out drawers and scattering their contents on the floor as he pawed through them, Joe turned as Barney spoke, and crossed the intervening space in two long strides.

"Get out of my way or I'll kill you too!" Barney shrank back.

Muttering curses, Joe seized the girl's dress at the throat and ripped it open. When he stood up he held a soiled envelop in his hand.

"Should have thought of that before." He grinned evilly down at Barney as he placed it securely in his pocket. "Now, louse," he said then, fixing Barney with his murderous eyes, "I'll take care of you."

With a sudden movement he snatched at Barney's coat. And, though Barney's breath was all but knocked out of him with the impact against Joe's huge frame, queerly enough his fear left him with that contact, and the horror he had felt was now changed into loathing. For the first time in his life Barney O'Malley knew what it was to hate.

"It's murder you like, is it?" he gasped between teeth that were clenched. "I'll give it to you then!" He fought like a maniac to free himself, biting and kicking.

The evil grin never left Joe's face. With one hand he held Barney off at arm's length as though he were a terrier, while with the other he slapped his head with the flat of his hand. Unmindful of Barney's frantic curses and efforts to get free, Joe held him thus for a few seconds.

"No," he said then, as though thinking aloud, "I ain't killin' you now. I got to use you yet."

He shifted his hold, grasped him by the back of the neck and one elbow and shoved him toward the wall cabinet.

"Take hold of that door, louse," he directed. "Now put your hand on the glass and push it shut."

With a twist at his neck, he forced Barney to do as he was told; made him handle other objects in the room. Then he laughed softly and, pushing Barney before him, left the house.

"Now, you doublecrossing yellow rat!" he said with a sneer, as he forced Barney into the car. "That fixes you. And it puts me in the clear."

Then for the first time Barney noticed that Joe was wearing gloves—loose fitting ones of thin soft leather.

"You're drivin' north, now," Joe continued, "an' what's more," he concluded grimly, "you're never comin' back."

THEY drove all night, always steadily north, up the narrow ribbon of concrete which wound through Chicago's northern suburbs and into Wisconsin. They stopped for gas in Milwaukee, then pushed on again toward St. Paul. Barney's whole body ached from the cold. His hands felt as though they were frozen to the wheel and he hit them from time to time against the steering post to revive the circulation. But he drove on, doggedly, silent. From the side pocket of the car Joe hauled a bottle of whisky, from which he drank copiously and often. The liquor filled him with grim humor. He dug Barney playfully in the ribs with the muzzle of the pistol which he held ready in his overcoat pocket, and laughed.

"Tried to bump me, did you?" he chuckled throatily. "Thought I was fool enough to leave your rod loaded? Outsmarted you, louse, didn't I? 'What're you lettin' me in on this for?' says you.

You damn yap! Don't worry, buddie, you'll find out. Yes, sir, you'll find out." He laughed again, loudly.

As they rolled along, burning up the miles, Barney's hatred grew. He hated the sound of Keltzo's deep throated chuckle and the sight of his thick, stubby hands. And he suspected that Big Joe, when they started out, had already decided to kill Lou, bringing Barney along to take the blame. Wearing gloves himself, Joe had seen to it that plenty of Barney's fingerprints were left behind.

Barney believed he had figured out the scheme Joe was following. One man besides Lou knew where that stolen money was buried. Now Lou was dead and the man—the only other person who knew where it was hidden, according to Joe—was safe in jail. It was Joe's intention, he felt sure, to leave no one alive who could in any way implicate him. Just when it would take place Barney could not figure, but he was sure that at some time Joe would try to murder him also.

He might as well have saved himself the effort of trying to figure Joe's intentions toward himself, for Joe explained everything. Explained them fully, interspersed with curses and extravagant laughter.

"Y' got two murders against you on the books now, louse." This seemed to tickle Joe's sense of humor. "Yessir, them fingerprints'll look nice to the cops. Ain't that funny? I should be sore at you, kid, fer killin' my girl like that, but I can buy a lotta girls fer two hunderd and fifty grand. Didn't know you was startin' out to kill a girl, did you? Lotsa things you don't know. But don't you worry, see? They won't even bring you to trial. Know why?" He emphasized the words with pokes of the gun. "Because, louse, when we get through diggin' up that dough, they'll find you dead! Yessir, right alongside the hole we take the money out of. Wanta know where we're goin', do you? That's where! That's what I wanted you for, louse.

"You'll get the rap for bumpin' Lou tonight, see? They'll figure you killed her to get the paper sayin' where it's buried so you could go up an' steal it. We'll just drop this envelop an' the map up there too, see? It's got Lou's name on it. An' me, I'll be spendin' the dough. Ain't that nice, louse?" He roared in drunken laughter. "An' when they find you alongside that hole, what'll they think, pal?" Joe went on. "Will they go lookin' fer Big Joe Keltzo? They will not. They'll say, 'This here's Barney O'Malley. He must of killed that gal out on the Westside in Chicago—the one that was mixed up with the Roundout outfit. Now who do you s'pose killed Barney?' they'll say. 'He must'a' been in this with somebody else. An' somebody else must'a' decided he didn't wanta split with Barney,' they'll say. 'Who'd Barney pal around with?' they'll say. An' they'll round up your playmates in Chi, see?"

"Yeh!" Barney said. "Only you faded out the same time I did, don't forget that. An' besides," he added meaningly, "they might not find me there, dead. You an' me ain't through—yet."

"Listen to 'im!" Joe's drunken laugh sounded again, and he shoved Barney's head playfully. "We ain't through, ain't we? I'll say we ain't. What if I did blow the same time you did? Who cares? Kid, all I want you to do is lay there dead an' connect yerself with the bump-off of Lou. That's all. With you dead, boy, nobody'll have a thing on Big Joe, see? An' by the time they find you an' hunt down some clues, I'll have the dough put away safe enough. Then if somebody thinks about me—let 'em! I been arrested before. They can't prove a thing. Not a damn' thing. I'll be rich an' nobody can do a damn' thing about it. Ain't that nice?"

Barney did not reply. Joe's words brought the same feeling he had years before when, wet and miserable, he had huddled in a mud soaked trench and listened to the whispered word of the zero hour; a fatalistic sensation that this night would be his last. But, just as, following that

first sinking sensation of fear, he had crawled, unafraid, across the stinking shell holes of No Man's Land, so, now, he had the same attitude.

"I've got out of worse places than this," he mumbled to himself, and drove on saying nothing.

Knowing Joe had condemned him to death he watched him, thereafter, like a hawk. If Joe would only get drunk! But Joe was taking no chances either, and the liquor apparently did nothing to him.

Thus they drove on. When, at dusk the next day, they came to the outskirts of St. Paul, Joe suddenly became quiet, watching the road with care.

"This way," he growled at last. "Turn to the left—down the next street to the right. That three-story building. That's us."

When they got out of the car, keeping Barney before him, Joe directed the way up three flights of dingy stairs to the top floor. He winked as he inserted a key in the lock.

"Think of everything, don't I, boy?" He switched on the light and pushed Barney toward a back room, opening the door and jerking his head toward a bed. "Lie down." He grinned as Barney obeyed. "Sorry I ain't got no pajammies, louse," he went on with a smirk. "Now which way d'you want to sleep, on your back or the other way round?"

"Go to hell!" Barney muttered.

Too exhausted to resist anything, he lay on the bed and glared up at his tormentor.

Keeping watch of the figure on the bed, Joe opened the bottom drawer of a dresser and brought out two pairs of handcuffs. At sight of these, Barney sat up. Joe swept him down with a savage push and, as he lay there, snapped a pair of the handcuffs to his wrists, twining the short chain about the iron post of the bed. He tried the other pair on Barney's ankles, but they were too small.

"Sweet dreams!" He grinned. "And remember—one yip outa you'll be your last."

THEY lived together in that apartment for six months. During that time neither one of them left it, night or day. Six months of torture for Barney, with nothing but almost certain death to look forward to; nothing to do but watch this bullying fellow, listen to his rasping voice, watch him guzzle whisky. Six months of irksome days and nights that seemed endless. The routine was always the same. In the evenings Joe usually got drunk.

With his sneering grin he would set a bottle and glass on the table in the bedroom.

"C'mon, yap," he would say then. "Time for bed."

And Barney learned not to argue over these commands. He did, once, to be knocked down by Joe and forcibly manacled to the bed. Every night Joe handcuffed him to the bed post. Then for an hour or two, his feet perched on the table, he drank from his bottle, taunted Barney and watched with malicious amusement as his eyes lighted with anger and rage.

Sometimes he sang songs—lewd anthems of the waterfront, his bleary eyes fixed on Barney, moving his half filled glass in cadence, and keeping time with his foot, his voice roaring out through the night until Barney wondered the neighbors did not complain to the police. Perhaps there were no neighbors. Barney did not know. He never heard another sound in the building except that made by themselves. At any rate there never was any interruption.

Sometimes Joe became sentimental and spent hours telling Barney how sorry he was for himself. Tears would flow from his pop eyes, his bovine face would contort into hideous lines and he would blubber like a baby over "poor little girl Lou" whom he had murdered. Like as not the next moment he would rouse himself to boast proudly of other crimes.

After such a session Barney would drop into fitful sleep, living through hideous nights peopled with ogres with grotesque faces who tried to strangle him to death, and waken after a few hours of slumber to

find Joe bending over the bed, his huge head, with its leering eyes and sensuous lips stretched evilly above bad teeth, assuming gigantic proportions.

The days were fully as fantastic. Joe freed him every morning. Barney was made to clean the flat every day, and he did the cooking and washed the dishes—for no one ever was allowed inside the place. Joe's boast on the night they arrived, that he had thought of everything, was not without foundation. The pantry shelves were piled high with food—canned goods of every description—a supply of everything sufficient to last longer than six months if necessary. A closet was stocked to the ceiling with cases of wine and whisky. Whether there was truth in this report of buried treasure or not, Joe had certainly made his plans with the conviction that it was a certainty. Another instance of his vision was the morning and afternoon paper, delivered daily and paid for a year in advance.

As the weeks wore on, both men suffered from the enforced confinement. Barney's nerves were worn raw, and Joe was like a caged tiger. He got drunk more and more often.

"If we're going after this money, why don't we go and get it over with?" Barney demanded irritably one day.

"There ain't no hurry, pal." Joe eased himself into a chair and poured himself a drink. "Don't be in such a rush to die. You'll be there soon enough." He tossed off the drink and glowered across the room. "Think I'm a sap, do you?" He took a few more drinks. "Funny," he said, "most saps figure like you do. Most guys, now, if they had this here map, would make right for the place and dig it up. Am I right? You're damn right. But me now, I ain't that dumb. That mob knows Lou's dead, see? An' they know I've left town, too. You said that, didn't you? Well, you ain't so dumb, at that. But three of the mob's out on bail, see? Maybe they'll think about me an' this dough. Maybe they won't. If they do, then they're watchin' for me to make a move for it right away, an' I ain't takin' no chances. I can wait. Yes, sir, brother, I can wait plenty. They go to trial next month, pal. An' by summer they'll all be doin' time. Then the ground'll be nice and soft, see. An' the Federal dicks'll be lookin' for something else besides this two hundred and fifty grand that's missin'. Then you an' me, we mosey up there an' dig it up."

"Yeh," said Barney. "You ain't so smart, either. What about this guy that's in jail that put it away? When he hears that his girl is dead, why don't he tell these three birds that's out on bail where it's buried? Hell, you're as dumb as the rest of them. By the time we get there, it'll be all dug up and spent."

Joe squinted over at him and grinned.

"I said you was smart." He chuckled. "Can't keep nothin' from you, can I? Well, kid, I was lyin' to you. He ain't in jail, see? He's dead too—an' that leaves just me that knows where it is. Get me?"

AS WINTER wore on into spring there were several times when Barney might have freed himself. There was the night, for instance, when Joe neglected to fasten the handcuffs snugly about Barney's wrists. After Joe had taken himself off to bed Barney squeezed his hands through and lay there thinking. A knife from the kitchen; a stealthy approach to Joe's bed. One thrust and he would be free. He got up and tiptoed to the room where Joe lay, drunk. But instead of acting, Barney crept back to his own bed and contented himself with allowing Joe to find him there, next morning, unfettered. He knew he could be free, but it pleased him not to be. For there was something else now in Barney's mind besides freedom from this fellow—the money. In these weeks he had become accustomed to thinking of that money as his own. Not Joe's; not the Government's; not the persons' from whom it had been stolen, but his—Barney O'Malley's. And he did not know where it was. Joe had burned the map one day, after studying it closely.

But he kept the envelop with Lou's name on it. Joe was taking no chance.

"Now, pal," he had said, "there ain't nobody in the world knows where that junk is but me. An' there ain't nobody else going to, either."

Barney would wait, he decided, until they were on the way to where his money was supposed to be buried. Then would be the time. Make Joe tell where the money was; make him lead the way to it, then take it for his own. He gloated over the thought, and chafed at the delay. How he was to do this he did not know. But two hundred and fifty thousand dollars were worth gambling for.

One afternoon Joe looked up from the paper which he was reading, with one of his heavy smiles.

"Well, louse," he said with a sneer, "if you got any messages, write 'em out. Tonight's the night."

"Yeh?" said Barney.

He expressed no emotion, did not even look up from where he sat on the edge of the bed reading the sports section of the paper. But his heart skipped a beat and he tingled pleasantly with excitement. Joe went to a closet, brought forth a large bundle, ripped it open and dumped the contents on the table.

"C'mon, you!" he snarled. He tossed a faded blue shirt at Barney. "Get into that." Taking up a pair of khaki pants and two heavy shoes, he turned and saw that Barney was still seated on the bed. "Get up outa there!" he roared, and threw the mass of clothing at him.

One of the shoes struck Barney a glancing blow on the head. It stung him to fury. Leaping to his feet, he threw himself at Joe, kicking and aiming blows as he closed in. Astonished, Joe for a second was taken by surprise. Then with a grunt of anger as one of Barney's fists buried itself in his stomach he stepped in and crashed a blow to Barney's face—then stood over him where he lay on the floor.

"Tried for me again, eh?" His voice was soft and deadly, and there was no trace of a smile now. He aimed a kick at Barney's ribs. "Them rats went to jail today," he went on. "Twenty-five years, Sim Boley got—an' you, you got just about ten hours to live! Get up outa there, you damn little shrimp."

Fury possessed Barney as he struggled to his feet. Fury at himself for being so small, and against this other man for his strength to crush him. He looked at Joe with glaring, sunken eyes, repeating something he had told him many times.

"You an' me, we ain't through yet." But, inside he was sick and discouraged, and he did not believe his own words.

"We will be," Joe promised, "tomorrow morning. Now get into them togs or I'll let you have it right now." He sat on the edge of the bed and watched Barney change. "Little Sandow himself!" he jeered, as he looked at Barney's swelling muscles. "Too bad I ain't as soft as you figured I was."

"What is this," Barney mumbled, "a comic opera or something?"

"No, shrimp," Joe said. "We're goin' into the country, you an' me, an' we can't wear any full dress uniform. We go in this outfit and nobody'll notice us. Ain't that smart?"

When Barney was dressed Joe forced on a pair of handcuffs, then got into a similar set of clothes himself.

"All right. Let's get the hell outa here."

Although it was still daylight, he snapped on the lights. It was improbable that any one was watching the house, but, if they were, Joe was taking no chances. They would expect him to move at night. Therefore the lights would tend to avert suspicion of any one who happened to notice.

"You're playin' with a smart guy, shrimp," he told Barney as he motioned him toward the back door.

IN A SMALL garage on the rear of the lot stood another evidence of Joe's foresight—a dilapidated Ford touring car. He shoved Barney into this and piled in after him. The motor coughed and they rolled away, headed east.

"One yip outa you now," Joe said as they started, "an' I'll drill you, brother; so help me I will."

But Barney had no intention of calling a cop. He had gambled so far and he would go through with it. Outside the city Joe stopped and looked around to make sure no traffic was in sight.

"You drive from now on, louse. I can watch you better."

He unlocked the handcuffs and they made the change. They drove in silence except for Joe's directing grunts. After an hour of this they turned off into a dirt road that wound in and out through woods that grew more dense as they progressed.

"Turn off the road there and shut off the lights." Joe pointed to an open space ahead. "We camp here till morning."

Joe made no move to handcuff him again, but Barney could feel the press of a sharp muzzle against his side, an ever present caution against any false move. Joe sat there humming a little tune to himself.

Barney slumped down in the seat. Now was the time. If only he could catch Joe off his guard. If only he could get just one break! Just let Joe relax his vigilance long enough to allow him to seize that gun! After an hour or two he pretended to sleep and waited for the pressure of the muzzle to lessen. It did, after awhile. Barney shifted his weight and snored gently. No sound, no movement from Joe. He waited a few moments. Still no movement.

Barney's arms were resting on the steering wheel. He leaned his head back and allowed his right arm to slip, inch by inch, toward the edge of the wheel, his hand ready when it should drop to the seat, to wrench that gun from Joe's hand and press it against the other man's head. He felt his little finger hit the wood of the wheel, and tensed his body for the sudden move he knew he must make— *Now!*

His arm dropped—to be caught in a steel-like grip by Joe's free hand! Damn him! He pretended still to be asleep, expecting every second to feel the flaming stab of pain that would come if Joe decided to pull that trigger. Instead, however, Joe snipped a cigaret lighter into flame. Barney felt his hot breath as Joe leaned over to look into his face. He opened his eyes then, as sleepily as he could.

"Get the hell outa here," he grumbled.

He shut his eyes again and let his head fall back. Without a word Joe snapped the iron cuffs on Barney's wrists again, fastening them to the steering wheel. Lord! What a break! But at least he was still alive. Shortly thereafter he did fall asleep.

When he wakened it was daylight. The sun was obscured by dark scudding clouds. There was a slight breeze, but it was sultry hot. Joe was already awake, standing by the car. An impression in the long grass showed where he had spent the night.

"Tried to get me again, eh?" he sneered. His lip curled in contempt.

"What the hell you talking about?" Barney feigned anger.

"Never mind," Joe grinned as he leaned over to set him free. "Get goin'."

Barney backed the car into the road and they went on, branching off now and then into other roads which became nothing more than cleared tracks through an underbrush that steadily became heavier. It became increasingly evident to Barney that Joe had more than a vague knowledge of this country. He gave his directions with no hesitation.

"Know this place pretty good, don't you?" Barney said once.

"Shut your head," Joe growled.

It gave Barney something to puzzle over, but he got nowhere with the idea. They passed a shack once, alongside the road, but it was deserted. It was the only visible sign of civilization.

"Stop here," Joe finally directed. Keeping an eye on Barney, he reached into the back of the car and hauled a spade over the top of the seat and handed it to him, fixing him with a level, even glance. "We're takin' a walk, louse! An' you—you're diggin' your own grave. Ain't that nice?"

Gun in hand, he backed out of the car and motioned Barney to follow, then took his place in the rear, prodding him ahead of him through the underbrush.

"Straight ahead," he ordered.

It began to rain, the large drops pattering on the leaves overhead like an echo to their footsteps. Joe glanced about shrewdly.

"To the left. Over the next hill—that's it. By that big tree."

They stopped at the foot of the maple, where Joe seated himself at the base of the tree, his gun still ready for use.

"All right, you—dig. Right there where you're standing." Cursing to himself, Barney forced the spade through the turf. "Snap into it." Joe laughed. "Won't be long now, shrimp. Fifteen minutes maybe— How'd you rather die, louse?"

Outwardly calm, but raging inside, Barney kept doggedly on, watching for a break that did not come. Out of a corner of his eye he watched Joe; watched for one little lax moment. He had dug a hole three feet deep and one yard square, and had struck nothing.

"You missed it," Joe chided him. "To your left a little. That's it."

Barney gave the spade a vicious jab into the softened earth. There was a hollow echo, a scrape of metal against metal.

Joe was on his feet at the sound.

"That's it!" He gave a wheezing laugh of triumph, peering into the hole. "You've struck it, louse! I told you it—"

It was the moment for which Barney had been waiting. For just a fraction of a second, in his excitement, Joe lessened his caution as he bent to look into the hole. With a sucking intake of breath Barney, in that second, crashed the spade in an upward arc. Its sharp edge caught Joe just beneath the chin. He never finished his sentence. The words were choked back. His eyes widened with surprise. His hands closed convulsively and his gun exploded as his great body collapsed and sank to the ground, its head just over the brink of the hole as though he were looking for the treasure which he was never to enjoy.

Barney looked at him for a moment, then set to work, digging feverishly. He unearthed two large tin boxes tied with cord, and set them on the grass. Then he rested and took time to feel glad that he had been the instrument through which the world was rid of a worthless, dangerous rat.

BARNEY filled in the hole, packing it neatly into an even mound. As an added artistic touch, he stuck the spade into the earth at one end, then stood back to survey his handiwork. He picked up the two tin boxes and, one under each arm, set off for the car. He had never felt better. He was hungry, for he had had nothing to eat since the day before. But that could wait. He was free. He had killed Big Joe. And he was rich. He hugged the tin boxes to him fiercely. This was his money! Hadn't he earned the right to it? He hadn't been mixed up in the mail robbery, had he? And the bandits had been sent to jail yesterday. The paper had said so. Therefore, he figured, this money had been paid for. And he, Barney O'Malley, had suffered for six months. And now, by the Lord, he'd keep it.

Wouldn't Nora's eyes open up though? Nora! It was the first time he had thought of her in weeks. Get her anything she wanted now. And he'd have his own trucking business, too. Pretty swell. And with Big Joe disposed of there was no one to fear. He thought of the envelop in Joe's pocket with Lou's name on it. Who'd be connected with Lou's murder now? He laughed aloud at the irony of it. He set the boxes in the back of the car and started back.

At the first small town he struck he bought a suitcase. He packed the money in it, tossed the tin boxes away and drove on. At the next sizable town he left the machine parked near the station and purchased a ticket for Milwaukee. Two days later, resplendent in new clothes and a derby hat, he reached Chicago to tell his story to Nora. She had brains, Nora had.

She'd believe him. He did not tell her about the money. No use telling a girl everything. But, even so, she had not believed him.

"You mean—" Nora was clutching his arm, frightened eyes searching his face. "You mean you—killed him?"

"Baby," Barney cried wildly, "I've told you, haven't I? I've told you ten times. It was him or me. Can't you understand? Didn't I tell you? He kept me locked up—every night for six months. He took me up there in the woods to kill me—to bump me off! And he framed me. Lord, baby! Don't you get it? I'm telling the truth. Honest to God!" He took her by the shoulders and shook her gently, trying to make her understand.

"Murderer!" Nora said in a low, tense voice. "You—a murderer! And you expect me to marry you!"

"Kid, you gotta get me straight! You gotta see it my way! You ain't going to let me down this way, sweetie!"

He tried to put his arms around her. With that same terrified look in her eyes, Nora pushed him away.

"No—no!" She cried out in horror and covered her face. She rose to her feet, her hands clenched. "Keep away from me! Don't you dare touch me! You murdered a man. Go away! I don't ever want to see you again!"

Angry and hurt and frightened, Barney went. Murderer! He could still hear her say it. As he walked the streets he became terrified. He imagined each footfall behind him the introduction to a tap on the shoulder that would make him a prisoner. He rushed to his rooms—new and expensive rooms which he had chosen with such eager pleasure—locked the door and leaned against it for a full five minutes, his ear pressed against the crack, listening for possible footsteps.

He was convinced Nora would tell the police. And, if she told the police, his fingerprints would be taken; and if that were done he would be accused of the murder of Lou as well as of Big Joe. He undressed and threw himself into bed and tried to sleep. He thought of the money, sprang from the bed and jerked down the suitcase from its place on the closet shelf, and with hands that trembled, opened it to make sure no one had discovered what it contained.

He tried to read. The print was nothing but a blur. Finally he fell into fitful sleep at dawn, with all the lights burning. Three hours later he wakened, dressed in a fever of haste and left the house. Anything to get away. He thought of breakfast, but he had no appetite. This was foolish, Barney told himself. He tried to go over things calmly, step by step, but each time he thought of more reasons to prove he would be found out. Probably no one would find that grave for months. But—if they did! If Nora should tell the police! What a fool he had been to leave that spade in the ground! And the man who had sold him the suitcase had looked at him queerly. So had the station agent in that other town. And what a fool he had been to buy a lot of expensive clothes. Any one, or all, of those persons would recognize him again! By night he had forged around himself a compact chain of imaginary evidence.

TWO DAYS later he gave himself up and told his story to an amazed captain of police, who shook his head in disbelief, but who locked him up nevertheless. Barney's eyes were bleary. He had not eaten for three days and his face was a mass of stubbly beard. That night Barney slept peacefully for the first time in four nights. The next morning he was confronted by two hard eyed Government men who made him tell his story again. And these two took him to the Federal building, where a kindly old fellow with gray hair questioned him for hours and a stenographer took down everything he said.

"I guess it's the goods, Chief," one of the men to whom Barney had first told his story, said to the dignified old fellow. "The money was there in his room in the suitcase, just like he said."

"Remarkable," said the chief. "Do you suppose," he said, turning to Barney,

"that you could find that spot again—that place in the woods?"

"Sure," said Barney.

So they took him back up to Wisconsin, and he found the house for them where he had been kept prisoner for so long. The lights were still on. He found the grave, too, and the Federal men took a lot of pictures, then sent the body to the morgue. At sight of Joe, all Barney's old hatred returned.

"He was a rat," he told them. "Big Joe was a rat, and I don't give a damn if I do burn for it. He deserved to be killed."

Whereat the Federal men looked at him queerly and took him back to Chicago where Barney was placed in a cell while various important personages of the State and Federal Governments went into executive session. They brought Barney back into the room in less than an hour.

"All right, kid," the captain told him. "I guess it's all right for you to go. But you stay where we can get hold of you. You'll have to be around for the inquest."

"Don't kid me!" Barney said. "What the hell?" The captain looked hurt. "You tell him," he said to one of the Federal men.

"That was Willie Diamond you killed," the Postal Inspector explained. "Don't that mean anything to you?"

"No," said Barney. "Ain't I being held for murder?"

"Listen," the Federal man went on. "Willie Diamond was one of the slickest customers in the country. He was just using the name of Keltzo, and bootlegging was only a sideline. He's wanted on five or six charges. He was the one who engineered the Roundout mail robbery, and he was named in a secret indictment. He buried that money up there himself, along with the other two he told you about, and then killed both of them so he could grab all the money himself. We've been looking for him for five years. There is twenty-five thousand dollars reward for him, dead or alive, offered by the Government. You turned him in dead—so I guess you get the twenty-five grand."

"Jees!" Barney said. "You mean—I—me—I get twenty-five grand for killing him? And Big Joe was in on that mail robbery?"

The police captain snorted at such ignorance.

"He was the ringleader," he said. "Get that? The ringleader, that's all!"

"But what about the fellow I killed up on the North Side?"

"Oh, Anselmi!" The captain and the Federal man exchanged glances, and they both laughed. "Hell, you didn't kill Anselmi. Diamond—that is, Keltzo—thought Anselmi had something on him in connection with the mail robbery. So he had him taken for a ride. Two of Keltzo's mob confessed to that two months ago. They were executed last week. They weren't shooting at you at all. A couple bullets went wild, that's all."

Still unconvinced, Barney stood there, looking foolishly at the ring of faces. He had become so accustomed to thinking of himself as a criminal it was almost impossible to believe otherwise.

"And I can go, now? I'm free?"

"Yes!" The captain fairly shouted it. "Get the hell out of here—and leave your address with the desk sergeant!"

Barney walked out of the room in a daze. Free again! No trial for murder! And twenty-five grand coming to him from the Government for killing a man! Nora couldn't be squeamish about *that* money, anyhow! And he'd have his own trucking business, and they could get married. He raced to a phone booth and called her number.

"This is Barney, baby," he said when she answered. "Listen—"

"I told you—" Nora's voice was frigid, but Barney was not to be discouraged.

"I know you did, sweetie, but that was a long time ago. Listen, kiddo, everything is all jake. I'm telling you. And I can bring a cop along to prove what I've got to tell you is true."

"I don't believe in cops, anyway," Nora said.

"All right," Barney said. "I'm coming

over anyway whether you like it or not, see?" There was a silence and Barney thought she had hung up. "Hello?"

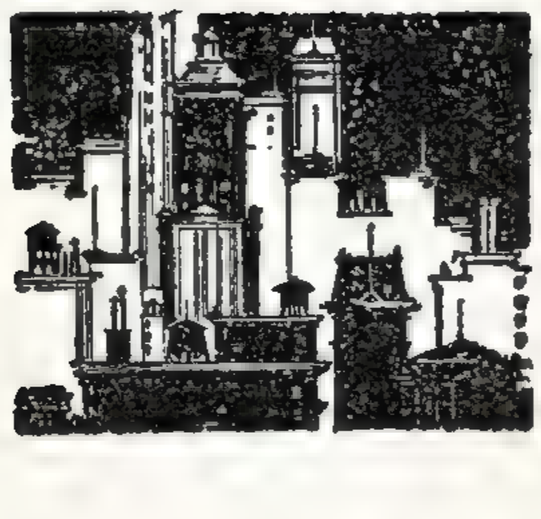
"Yes—I'm here."

"You're not cryin', are you, baby? Say, listen, I'm coming over right now. Right now. D'you hear me?"

"Yes. But you needn't yell."

"I said I'm coming over right now, and I am."

"Then hurry up," Nora said. "You're wasting time."



SHACKLED

A Story of the Chilean Desert

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

ROTHERT wore neither mask nor disguise. He was not even armed with a gun. His plan for holding up the pay car, and of wresting one hundred and eighty thousand Chilean pesos from three armed men, was builded entirely upon a series of vulpine stratagems and not in any manner upon violence.

The three armed men, prospective victims of his guile, had just parked their automobile back of the depot at the *pampa* town of Calamidad. They were Murdock, assistant cashier and acting paymaster of the Cobrillo copper mine, Doug Trueblood, the official guard, and Husky Bill Wilde, the chauffeur. Rothert, from far down along the freight platform, spied covertly upon this trio. He knew that they formed the regular escort of the pay car. They had arrived, on this Saturday morning as usual, at about half an hour before train time.

And thus their joint responsibility would not begin for half an hour, at nine o'clock, when *El Nocturnal* would pull in from the port of Antofagasta. For all that it ran on an absurd thirty-inch gage, *El Nocturnal* was the fast, crack train on the *pampa*. It carried sleepers, diner and every modern *de luxe* comfort for patrons heading inland to La Paz, Bolivia. Rothert knew that Murdock was accustomed to meet it every Saturday morning, and to take from it an express shipment of approximately one hundred and eighty thousand Chilean pesos.

Nearly twenty thousand American dollars! It was more than enough to tempt Rothert. Rothert himself was an employee at Cobrillo, the gigantic, leaching-vat, electrolytic, Yankee owned copper plant twenty-four kilometers out from Calamidad on the Atacama *pampa*. Rothert, in fact, was the night shift tool

dresser on test rig No. 8. Just now he was supposed to be up at camp, asleep in his cabin. Far from that, he was here in Calamidad scheming to outwit and to rob Murdock, Trueblood and Wilde.

He saw the three men park their auto and then stroll across the street to Pedro's *cantina* and pool hall. This, Rothert knew, was their usual ritual of whiling away the interval before the arrival of the train.

A crafty smile played across the cheeks of Rothert. They were sallow, hollowed cheeks, beneath eyes which were continually shifting under the spur of chronic discontent. He watched the three men as they strode over to Pedro's. Murdock was in the lead. He, the paymaster, was an alert Scotsman, tall and sandy, with a closely trimmed mustache. After Murdock trailed Doug Trueblood, the guard. Trueblood took his job of money guarding seriously. He wore a regular frontier cartridge belt with a holstered gun at his right hip. More than that, Rothert, from previous reconnaissance, knew that once the money satchel came Trueblood would chain it to his left wrist. Considering that Murdock and Wilde also carried pistols, the net total of precautions seemed to make holdup by a lone bandit an impossibility.

Of the trio now crossing the street, Husky Bill Wilde was last in line. Wilde was official chauffeur for the pay car. Sometimes he was called Husky Bill and sometimes he was called Whispering Willie. He was afflicted with a constriction of the throat from shell shock suffered in the war, which forced him to speak huskily, or rather in hoarse whispers.

The most noticeable thing about this chauffeur, Wilde, was his uniform. Whispering Willie was all leather and buckles. He was as military as though he were still an orderly to a brigadier general. A final touch to Wilde's present chauffeur's uniform was a chin strap which, Junker fashion, he used to keep his vizored cap from blowing away in the *pampa* winds.

Murdock, Trueblood and Wilde now disappeared into Pedro's *cantina*. Rothert knew they would take a single round of drinks and then play one or two games of French pool.

So Rothert slouched down the shadow of the depot toward the parked pay car. He moved furtively, pulling his black felt hat far down over his eyes. Except for an occasional shawled Chilena passing to or from the *tiendas*, and a tramp drunk who was sunning himself on the opposite walk, the street was deserted. No one noticed Rothert. Or if he was noticed he seemed merely to be an American mine employee waiting for the train and seeking the shady side of the depot.

In a moment more he was between the depot and the parked pay car.

He could not, of course, rob the car now because it had not yet received its cargo of potential loot. What Rothert actually did, clandestinely there at the parked auto, was this:

He took from his pocket a three-foot length of rubber tube. He removed the cap from the car's gasoline tank. He inserted one end of the tube. He sucked, until his mouth was full of gasoline. This he spewed out, dropping the hose, which now, an effective siphon, ran a full stream of gasoline out upon the ground.

Rothert let the gas waste into the dust. While it did so he drew from his pocket another property of malignant preparation. It was a small green bottle. He had purloined it from the wares of an unethical bartender, the keeper of a dive which made a practise of rolling certain spreeful gringo customers. Rothert was no chemist; he did not know the formula for the solution in this green bottle, but he did know that it packed a mighty wallop, whether taken in water or booze. It contained knockout drops so artfully prepared as to be almost tasteless, yet with sufficient drug to dope an able man with completeness and precision.

Murdock's car, of course, carried the regulation canvas water bag which hangs to the frame of nearly all desert trekking automobiles. Whether on Sahara, Mo-

jave or Atacama, the desert wise motorist rarely drives out without taking along this rectangular bag of canvas containing water for drinking. It is generally allowed to hang outside in the sun where it sweats, thus cooling the water within.

Rothert now withdrew the cork from the pay car's water bag and poured in the contents of his little green bottle. He restored the cork. He then returned his attention to the fast draining gas tank. With a stick he measured the remaining fuel. It was still three inches deep in the tank.

He took repeated soundings. Two inches—one inch—a bare half-inch; at the latter gage Rothert jerked away his siphon. He screwed on the tank's cap. He slunk down the shadow of the depot, turned a dingy corner and was gone.

FIVE minutes later Rothert was driving back to Cobrillo along what was known as the old arroyo trail. His vehicle was a four-cylinder car which was the rightful property of Steam Shovel Bill Henderson, a staffman now ill at the company hospital. Upon coming off night shift at dawn this morning, Rothert had stolen this car from Henderson's garage. With it he had driven down the arroyo trail the twenty-four kilometers to Calamidad. Now he was returning toward the big copper mine at Cobrillo.

After driving only a third of the distance, however, he stopped, got out, crawled to the brink of the arroyo and peered east across the Atacama Desert. He could see over some sixty kilometers of yellow dust to the snow capped peaks along the Bolivian border. On the intervening plain there was not so much as a blade of grass; not even one single spine of cactus or twig of sage. It was the bleak *Desierto de Atacama*, a barren which has thirsted through the centuries and whose single river, the Loa, is as salty as the sea.

What Rothert spied upon, however, was the main road. This trail up the arroyo was a route long abandoned, a track thought to have been once used by the Incas for shade from the sun and screen from enemies. Of late the Cobrillo mine had built a straight, airline highway to the railhead of Calamidad. This main road paralleled the arroyo only a short distance east.

Along it the returning pay car had not yet hove in sight. Rothert was fairly sure it would run out of gas somewhere in the middle third of the route. On that score he had done quite a bit of figuring. He had taken into account that the road back to the mine was an upgrade of about two per cent. He had allowed for the gas which would remain in the carburetor and feed line. On this basis he had estimated that a scant half-inch of fuel in the tank would be just about right to get the pay car halfway home.

Rothert erred in this calculation, for when the pay car finally did appear coming up the main road it was traveling smoothly. It passed the ambush of Rothert and continued on toward Cobrillo. Rothert petulantly abused his judgment; he should have drained out a little more gas.

He got back into his own auto and drove slowly up the old arroyo trail. Three kilometers farther he espied his prey again. The pay car was still moving along the main road.

It was only eight kilometers from the mine when the pay car finally came to a stop. Rothert was peering out, not far west from it under the arroyo bank. He saw the chauffeur, Whispering Willie Wilde, get out and lift up the hood. Wilde was plainly puzzled. It was likely to be some minutes before he realized why the motor had gone dead. Wilde would know, of course, that he had begun the round trip journey of forty-eight kilometers with a full gas tank. By rights he should have ten gallons left when he got back to the mine.

So, as Rothert had anticipated, there was some delay of puzzlement while Willie Wilde investigated his motor. Finally Murdock, the paymaster, got out and came to his aid. Rothert could see

them discussing the mishap, there in the road under the broiling sun. He saw Murdock wipe perspiration from his brow, then gaze up-pampa to the distant buildings of the mine, as though estimating the inconveniences of a possible forced hike.

The bag of money, naturally, had to go on. Today was Saturday, pay day for three thousand native miners. It would be the labor of hours to get this money into the proper envelopes, by the time these laborers formed in long queues at the departmental pay windows. Incidentally Rothert knew that the mishap would not affect the gringo staffmen of the plant, as these, mostly Americans, were paid monthly by check.

And now Rothert saw Whispering Willie walk around to the rear and sound the gas tank. His expression of disgust told its own story. He saw Murdock make a gesture of annoyance. Beyond doubt Murdock was bawling out Wilde for carelessness. Rothert saw the uniformed chauffeur remonstrating in his own defense, talking mostly with his hands, insisting, of course, that he had filled the tank that morning.

It made no difference; the tank was now dry as a bone.

Rothert saw Murdock, Trueblood and Wilde go into conference. Trueblood, the guard, had not yet gotten out of the car. A moment later, however, he disembarked, awkwardly, lugging with him a stout suitcase which was chained to his left wrist.

Rothert had spent some time figuring on the weight of that money bag. It was bound to be heavy. It contained the weekly shipment from the Anglo-Chilean bank at Antofagasta, with Chilean currency so sorted that it would provide the fillings for three thousand peon pay envelops at an average of sixty pesos each. In all a prospective loot, at the current exchange, of about twenty thousand American dollars. It was Rothert's idea that it would weigh around fifty pounds.

There it was, as on all Saturdays, chained to the left wrist of the bonded guard, Doug Trueblood. The decision of the three stranded men now became apparent, and was the decision which Rothert had predicted in advance. It was only eight kilometers on to the destination. The trio prepared to abandon temporarily the pay car and hike in with the money. Two of them at a time could carry the bag between them. It would be a punishment, under that broiling desert sun, but nevertheless it could be done; it would entail no hazard other than an hour of fatigue.

INEVITABLE it was, of course, that they would refresh themselves with a drink of water before starting out. That part of it Rothert had never doubted for a moment. Ordinarily they would not have taken a drink *en route* home. The journey without mishap would only have been one of a half-hour. Presumably they had refreshed themselves at the Calamidad *cantina*. The auto water bag was only for an emergency stalling, such as a tire blowout or for some unforeseen bit of grief like this one now encountered.

Rothert, peering from the arroyo, saw Whispering Willie Wilde take the water bag from its hook on the frame. All three of the men sat down in a row on the running board. Paymaster Murdock being senior both in rank and age, the bag was handed to him for the first drink.

Murdock upturned it to his lips, treating himself to a generous potion of its doped content. He passed it to Doug Trueblood. Rothert, spying from the arroyo, dodged back under the shelter of his bank.

It would not do, at this last moment, to risk being seen. The trio on the running board were facing west, toward his ambush. If a taste in the water had aroused suspicions, he did not want to be seen with his head peering over a bank.

So he took no further chances, and waited under shelter for a full five minutes. He felt sure that the knockout drops would drug the victims within that

interval, provided that the third man took a generous swallow before the first man began to get dopey.

In five minutes Rothert peered out. What he saw elated him, fulfilled the maximum of his hopes. The three men were still on the running board of the pay car. They reclined there in partial collapse, backs against the car body, chins on chests, as though some one had successively struck them each a deadly blow upon the head.

Rothert decided that if any one of them were conscious when he arrived, he would give up in entirety his planned coup. Rothert was not going to acquire this money at the penalty of being a fugitive for life. He would take it unseen and without violence or not at all. On that hypothesis he was neither masked nor armed. If a single victim were merely dopey but conscious, Rothert would, with an air of innocence, offer help, would actually give them and their money bag a lift to camp.

Down in the bed of the arroyo he entered his own car and drove out up a slope of the east bank. He then drove the short distance to the stranded pay car. Thus he reached the main road at right angles, his balloon tires of course leaving broad tracks in the dust. The Atacama *pampa* is perennially covered with a thin layer of yellow dust, under which is a footing as hard as rock.

Rothert turned into the ruts of the main road and stopped directly by the side of the pay car. There, collapsed on the running board, were the three victims. A moment's investigation and he found that all three were quite dead to the world. They were unconscious.

The suitcase of money lay at the feet of Doug Trueblood. It was chained to Trueblood's wrist. The money bag was made for the purpose, a foot length of steel chain being riveted to it, the outer end of the chain being equipped with a cuff; in fact a standard police handcuff.

Immediately Rothert frisked the pockets of Trueblood. He produced a key. With this he unlocked the cuff of the chain which circled Trueblood's wrist. The chain fell free against the side of the bag. Rothert threw the key as far as he could out into the *pampa* dust. He then hoisted the bag into his own car. Hoisted is the word, since he found the bag to be indeed a full fifty pounds of weight.

The bandit's next move was to take the automatic gun from Trueblood's holster. He found another gun in the hip pocket of Paymaster Murdock. He found a third weapon on Whispering Willie Wilde. Two of these weapons Rothert tossed into his own auto. The third he pocketed, in order to defend his retreat in case a victim came to consciousness before he, Rothert, was out of sight.

Not that Rothert meant to flee with the loot. That would have been the mode of an ordinary bandit, but Rothert was no ordinary bandit. His entire coup had been aforethought with safety first—security from suspicion or pursuit even at the risk of losing the plunder.

He would not flee with this plunder. He would cache it in the nearest available spot of concealment, then repair to his own sleeping quarters at Cobrillo, empty handed.

Where, on this desert *pampa*, could he conceal such bulky loot? Rothert's eyes roved about over the terrain. The solution came as though made to the order of his crime. There, only a hundred meters on toward Cobrillo and about a dozen steps to the right of the road, was a *pozo*.

This was not strange, because the *pampa* about Cobrillo was, and is, studded with *pozos*. A *pozo* is a hole about six meters deep and usually about two meters in diameter. By Chilean mining law one of them will hold a standard mining claim of one *hectare* area. Its existence is conceded as proof that work has been started on a mine.

And therefore when the great American copper company had erected its hundred million dollar reduction plant, it had "proved" the desert for miles in all directions, thus to provide area for operation fifty and a hundred years to come.

On each square of a hundred meters there was a *pozo*. The *pozo* just a little up the road from Rothert was one of the most outlying *pozos* of many. Instantly the vandal elected to use it for a cache.

To that end he entered his car and drove a hundred meters up the ruts of the road. He stopped there, got out with the money bag. The jingling of its dangling chain annoyed him a little, but time just now was too precious to waste on the chain. After his final getaway he could, of course, cut it away with a cold chisel.

Hefting the bag now, he moved with a dozen long strides to the rim of the *pozo*. He peered into it. It was abandoned, its depths dark and quite without equipment.

Rothert now dropped the bag, chain and all, down into the hole. Then he took a long step backward,

Stooping and reaching forward, he smoothed with the palm of his hand the footprint in the dust which he had just vacated. He stepped another step backward toward the road. Again he smoothed the dust he had just vacated, obliterating another track.

Thus he smoothed out all of his dozen footprints between the *pozo* and the running board of his car.

ONCE in his car, he backed it down the ruts a hundred meters to the stranded auto on whose running board the three doped men were still collapsed. Arriving there, Rothert turned his own car out of the road, pointing its head directly east toward the serrated snows of the Andean range.

By its broad tire tracks the bandit car had plainly approached from the west. Rothert meant to create the illusion that it had been driven on eastward, merely crossing the road at the site of crime.

The genius of his plot was this: he was not going with it. He was going to let the bandit car run away by itself. The hard level *pampa*, with only an inch of dust, would make a fine track of flight. A skiddy track, perhaps, but what of that? There was absolutely nothing to hit.

Theoretically, Rothert knew, the car would run until it exhausted its fuel. Actually it would not do that, he likewise knew, because little by little the steering wheel would turn until the unguided car began running in short, crazy circles, like a locoed steer. A few such wild circles and the car would turn turtle.

Rothert did not want it to turn turtle until it was far, far away. He wanted the tire tracks of flight to decoy pursuit until he himself was safely in his camp bunk, feigning a night shiftman's daytime sleep. So as a last minute precaution Rothert decided to strap the steering wheel into a position of fair rigidity, with all wheels aligned and the car headed due east at right angles to the road.

He looked about for a strap, or some usable substitute. Seconds were precious, and Rothert wasted very few of them. The first strap he saw was the chin strap of Willie Wilde's uniform cap. This short strap was buckled just under the chauffeur's chin.

Rothert snatched the cap, strap and all. He unbuckled the ends of the strap. He passed one end between those two spokes of his steering wheel which were nearest the nickel handle of the car door. He passed the other strap end through this nickel handle itself, buckled the strap and drew it to its tautest notch. The chauffeur's cap stretched out, and formed part of the strap.

Rothert's motor had been running all the while. He turned the hand gas lever up three notches. He released the clutch and stepped out on the ground. Off went the machine, in second gear and without further benefit of human guidance, headed due east from the road. For a full minute Rothert watched its flight. It gained speed and did not materially swerve. The strapped steering wheel was working like a charm—the car running as smoothly almost as though Chauffeur Wilde, from whom the strap had been despoiled, had himself been seated there under the wheel.

Rothert now retreated. Although he was unencumbered by loot, his retreat was awkwardly slow. He accomplished it by walking backward westerly, in the opposite direction to that taken by the car.

He paused at each step, stooping, and smoothed the dust over his latest track. This afforded a slow retreat, but he was getting farther and farther from his crime all the while. He also had the satisfaction of seeing his own driverless car become more and more of a speck in the distance. It was now more than a mile away, and still going strong. Rothert knew that the first impassable barrier in its path of flight would be the Loa River, twenty kilos east, a stream fed by Andean snows although fouled by salt here on the desert *pampa*. Rothert hardly expected the car to get that far without turning over. He could see that its course was already bending slightly southeast, and assumed that the strap was stretching, thus allowing the steering wheel a slight play.

Swiftly on east went the car, and slowly westward backed Rothert. His advantage was that he did not have to be very subtle in smoothing his footprints. The apparent course of the bandit's flight would be so ridiculously obvious that the posse would hardly hesitate at all. Off they would scurry in full cry, eastward. They would have no motive to dub around, searching for smoothed bootprints. And given a good blow of wind, such as came up at almost every nightfall, there would be no tracks at all.

The three doped men! In his retreat Rothert could see them still slumped on the running board of the pay car. They would not perish; there would be no murder in this crime, for relief could be expected speedily. As soon as the pay car became an hour overdue, the chief cashier up at Cobrillo would become worried. He would telephone Calamidad. The expressman at Calamidad would inform him that the pay car had left the railhead on time. The result—a search party and the rescue of Murdock, Trueblood and Whispering Willie Wilde.

Thus without qualms that he might be a murderer, Rothert in fifteen minutes reached his goal, which was the arroyo. Into the old road on the bed of this arroyo he descended, and made no further effort to disguise his tracks. He set out for home, afoot.

It was eight kilometers. Rothert trekked swiftly, and in a little more than an hour he reached the outskirts of the Cobrillo mine.

The mine was, and is, a veritable city on the desert. Acres of leaching vats, crushers, housing for thousands of acid tanks. Corrugated iron living quarters for two hundred Yankee staffmen and three thousand native miners. Steam shovels in brigades. Ore trains roaring down from the shovel benches to the crushers. Here they were all clustered at the foot of a long, gray-green desert hill of low grade copper ore.

ROTHERT arrived, by design, at the comparative squalid area just back of the native quarters. At an outlying dump heap, amid a litter of trash and tin cans, he discarded such incriminating evidence as was still on his own person. First he got rid of the rubber tube which he had used as a siphon; next he discarded the green dope bottle; finally he lost, among the old cans, the purloined pistol. He did not know whether it was Murdock's pistol, Trueblood's or Wilde's. He had taken all three pistols, tossed two at random into the runaway car so that they could not be used in his pursuit, and pocketed the third in case of an immediate fight. He now discarded the latter at the dump heap, along with the tube and the green bottle.

He slunk on into camp, through streets of sheet iron huts, until he came to the row of better cabins used by the engineers and lower ranks of bachelor staffmen. One of these was Rothert's. He made it without attracting, as far as he could tell, any particular attention. But suppose some one did happen to notice his approach! He could claim that he had just

arisen from his daytime sleep to take a short walk about camp.

He entered his cabin. Purposely he had left his door unlocked today, which was Saturday, so that the native woman who laundered his shirts could return the week's washing. He found this washing, bundled, just inside the door. He also found a dummy just as he had left it, rolled in human form inside the blankets of the bunk. The latter had been his preparation of alibi. The Chilean always took his washing on Mondays and returned it on Saturdays. No doubt today she had, as usual, knocked, received no response, then pushed the door open and seen what appeared to be the tenant asleep in his bunk. Merely tossing the bundle in, she would have closed the door and gone her way.

Rothert now actually went to bed. He resolved to sleep until evening mess; but he could not. His brain was too excited. His nerves were too tautly tensed, as he listened for the beginnings of a hue and cry out on the camp streets. Early in the afternoon he began hearing such an outcry. Out in front of the cabins he heard excited voices of passing staffmen, in discussion of some dramatic bit of news.

"Murdock stuck up for the payroll, you say, Joe?" he heard one voice exclaim. "Doped? What do you know about that?"

"Yeh, Ben," affirmed the informant. "They brought Murdock in, and Doug Trueblood. Both of 'em are O.K. What they can't figure out is what happened to Whispering Willie Wilde."

Rothert became immediately alert. What was that about Whispering Willie Wilde? Why hadn't they brought him in, too?

Rothert heard no more for a long while. There were voices, but they were too far up the street. He battled mightily against the temptation to arise, dress, to go out and join in the discussion.

Later his ears did catch one further informative speech—

"Yeh, Tom, Como No Stapp's following the bandit car with a posse."

That was better, thought Rothert. Naturally he had expected Como No Stapp, who was a sort of glorified gunman, an ex-R.C.M.P. now employed here at this Chilean mine in the capacity of camp marshal, to organize a posse and track the car in which the bandit had presumably fled. Great stuff, for it would get the posse far away from that *pozo* in which the loot was really cached. They would, of course, ultimately find a wrecked car without occupant.

Another hour, and another gossipy voice came from the camp street.

"Heard the latest, Jimmie? They're beginning to say it was Willie Wilde that done the trick."

"Willie Wilde? Why the heck do they suspect Willie Wilde?"

"He's missing, ain't he? They found Murdock and Trueblood, doped. It was Willie who filled that water bag, wasn't it? It was Willie who could have on purpose only left a little gas in the tank, wasn't it? He's disappeared, ain't he? Where's he gone, unless he copped the money?"

Rothert stiffened in his bunk. Here was a break he had not expected. Was it a bad break, or a good one? He was not sure. Rothert knew of course that Whispering Willie Wilde was not guilty. That being the case, where the devil had he gone?

Rothert could stand the suspense no longer. He got up, dressed and went out into the street. It was nearly supper time anyway. The gossipy group out there had withdrawn, so Rothert strolled on down to the staffmen's mess house.

There he found a score of engineers and assistants who had just come off the day shifts. He found sleepy eyed men just out of bed, and due to go on the job at nightfall. One of the latter was Roughhouse Brodie, head driller on test rig No. 8 and Rothert's immediate boss.

Brodie had not heard a word of the robbery. Rothert pretended not to have heard, and crowded up to where Beggs

Benson was giving all known details to Brodie.

"Yeh, Roughhouse," Benson was reciting, "it looks like Whispering Willie made a clean getaway."

"But," queried some one, "where did Willie get his extra car—the one used on the getaway?"

"Must have had it cached over in the arroyo just west of the road," explained Benson. "Anyway the two guns and the chauffeur's cap look mighty bad for Willie Wilde."

"What about two guns and a cap?" Brodie wanted to know.

"Haven't you heard? Como No just sent in a posseman to report the finding of the bandit car. It was stranded two feet deep in the middle of the Loa River, twenty miles east of the crime. Nothing in it but two guns and a cap. The guns belong to Murdock and Trueblood. The cap is Willie Wilde's."

"I don't exactly see—" began Brodie—

"Use your head," cut in Benson. "Naturally the bandit relieved the victims of their weapons. If Willie was a victim, why wasn't his gun there too? The answer is that Willie himself must have been the bandit. Naturally he's still got his own gun. With the loot, it's all the weight he wants. He drove twenty miles east across the *pampa* and tried to ford the Loa. He drowned his engine in midstream. So he got out with his loot and waded either up or down river, thus leaving no tracks. His chauffeur's cap, found in the car, is pretty near a dead giveaway. Why would the bandit want to steal Willie's cap?"

THERE were a dozen questions hurled at Benson, but Rothert did not wait to hear more. He withdrew, wrapped in his own thoughts. It began to look as if he had unintentionally framed Willie Wilde. Naturally he had not planned to frame any of the doped trio, because he could not have predicted that one of them would disappear. Where the devil had Wilde gone? And was it a good break, or a bad?

As for the cap, that was easily explained by Rothert, although it would naturally mislead any one else. The tug of the steering wheel had simply broken the buckled chin strap. The cap would then have fallen to the floor of the car. Why should any one believe that it had been used to tie the wheel?

Rothert made a hasty supper and then, having still an hour before going on the night shift at rig No. 8, he took a walk down to the native quarters. He knocked at a hut, and the door was opened by a stooped and oldish Chilena with cheeks as rugged and brown as the leather on an alligator hide satchel.

"Rosa," greeted Rothert, extending her a five peso bill, "you forgot to collect for the washing today."

"Oh, but the señor was asleep," answered the Chilena as she took the money. "It is that I did not wish to disturb the señor. *Gracias.*"

Rothert withdrew, much relieved. It seemed now that he had an airtight alibi. In a pinch, the woman would testify that she had seen Rothert asleep in his bunk at the very hour she had delivered the laundry, which was approximately the hour of the holdup down on the pampa.

And now Rothert decided to add one final touch of strategy. There was a case against the mysteriously missing Wilde. Why not capitalize it? To that end, Rothert strolled down to the old dump of tin cans where he had discarded certain incriminating evidence.

Dusk was now falling on the *pampa*. In its grayish gloom Rothert, at the trash dump, recovered the green bottle which had contained the knockout drops. A tiny amount of the dope was still in it. Rothert took this back to the gringo quarters and sought the cabin of Whispering Willie Wilde. A rear window was open. Rothert surreptitiously dropped the green bottle into that open window, then went his way to report at rig No. 8.

And now for the final getaway. It had better not be tonight, thought Rothert, because Como No was out scouring the *pampa* with a posse. Tonight he would

merely get himself fired from his job by the simple expedient of going to sleep on duty. Then tomorrow night he could leave with normal motive, that of looking for a new job at some other mine or nitrate *oficina* on the lower *pampas*.

There was no trouble at all about getting fired. Roughhouse Brodie, boss at the rig, was a stickler for discipline. Before midnight Rothert had been bawled out five times for desultory work at the forge. At one, when he broke a sledge handle with an awkward blow at a red hot bit, Brodie sarcastically advised his tool dresser to get a job pounding sand in a rat hole, as he was fit for nothing else. At two, when Rothert was caught asleep, Brodie got really sore; and when Rothert talked back he was thrown bodily out of the rig.

"You're fired," bawled Brodie. "Draw your time in the morning and don't come back."

Thus in the morning Rothert drew his time. It was Sunday, but Murdock, the assistant cashier, paid Rothert off anyway inasmuch as the man was fired.

"What's this I hear about you and Doug Trueblood getting doped?" inquired Rothert conversationally.

"Aye, lad, we were knocked out fair and cold," assented the Scotsman. "It all goes to show you canna trust any one these days. If there was a square lad in camp I would have picked Willie Wilde for the part."

"They still think it was Willie?"

"Aye. They even found the blooming dope bottle in his room. The chemist analyzed the stuff in the water bag, and it's the same as the dregs of the bottle."

"Do you think they'll find Wilde?" inquired Rothert.

"I dinna believe they will," offered Murdock. "He must have waded the river to the A. and B. railroad bridge, then hopped a freight for port. Sorry Roughhouse tied the can on you, my lad. Why don't you appeal to the Awld Man?"

"No use," deprecated Rothert with good humor. "Six A.M. always backs up his straw bosses, don't he? I'll drift down to the nitrate *pampa* for a new job."

Rothert went to his cabin. He packed his grip, then set to work making what is known in the mining country as a "chicken ladder." That is, he tied wooden cleats along the length of a thirty foot rope.

Late in the afternoon he purchased a second hand flivver from Beggs Benson for four hundred and seventy-five pesos. Although a poor vehicle, it would suffice to transport Rothert to Valparaiso, which he had selected as a port of flight.

He did not want to leave until well after nightfall. So after supper that Sunday evening he lolled around the Llampera Club, social headquarters for the staff, saying goodby to his acquaintances.

"Yeh, I'm leaving tonight," he told Jimmie Belden. "Cooler driving."

HE PULLED out at less than an hour short of midnight. Thirty-eight hours had elapsed since his crime of stealing one hundred and eighty thousand pesos from the pay car. The air was crisply cold. The stars were out, and the *pampa* was like a great yellow sea.

Rothert headed his flivver straight down the main road toward Calamidad. Eight kilometers, and he was at the cache of his loot. He pulled a dozen yards off the road and halted beside the *pozo*.

He was exultant, now that he could recover the plunder and retain it without fear. Here it was, only six or seven meters in the earth. Once he had it, his baggage of travel would merely consist of two grips instead of one. With a cold chisel from his tool box he could cut away the chain and be gone.

He took out his chicken ladder. His first minor difficulty was that he could find no anchorage, or "dead man," on the ground about the hole. Usually there was a peg, the stake which the original diggers of the *pozo* had used to attach their own chicken ladder, but in this case Rothert found no peg whatever.

A happy solution struck him. His flivver was backed to within three yards of the rim. He put on the brakes hard.

Then he tied the upper end of his cleated rope to the rear axle of the car.

What better anchorage could a man want? Certainly the weight of the braked car would resist his own descension.

So Rothert let the cleated rope down into the *pozo*. He got to his knees, got a foot on the upper cleat and began to descend down into the darkness of the pit.

He had no more than taken three groping backward steps down the cleats when he halted, an unexplainable chill gripping him. He suddenly became afraid. Afraid of what?

He did not know what, but he sensed a strange peril. All sorts of fancies began to harass him. How did he know the *pozo* was only six meters deep? Mining law required a clear five meters, and they were usually six; but how did he know but what this particular hole was a shaft instead of a *pozo?* Maybe his rope did not reach the bottom! Maybe he had tossed the loot to a depth he could never reach.

He took another step down the cleats. Suppose the infernal rope would break! How the devil would he get out? He wished he had not left that motor running. It might start with a jerk. Or the thrumming of the engine might be heard by some one coming along the road. Best get it over with quick. Rothert took three more quick steps of descension.

It got darker and colder down there. Darker and colder and more frightfully mysterious. Rothert could hear his own breathings and the thumping of his heart. Or was it—Good God! was it his own breathings or another's? He chilled to the base of his spine as he seemed to sense a *second human presence* in the pit with him, just below his feet.

Rothert's fright now became stark panic. It struck deep to the roots of him. He trembled there, clinging to the cleated rope. His sense of peril increased; more and more he acquired a terrible feeling that there was a being waiting for him, down there at the bottom of the rope.

He was cold, yet withal he was sweating and shaking like a leaf. He fought his fear. Only a few more steps down and he would have the bag. He could scramble out and be gone. He took one more step of groping descension.

Then he shrieked like a devil cast into hell. For a hand—hand of human or monster or subterranean spirit — had grasped his own left ankle with a grip of steel.

Rothert fairly screamed. Only the stars heard him—unless it was that monster, demon or man, down in the pitchy pit beneath his feet. He kicked with his free foot and screamed again.

The grip held on his ankle. Inexorably it held. Rothert kicked frantically, but failed to shake it loose. Then in a hopeless frenzy of funk he tried to scramble back up the cleated rope. He could not. He could not climb and drag with him that which clung to his foot.

Then, suddenly, the thing which gripped his leg found voice, and spoke. It was a voice hardly more than a husky whisper. Rothert knew it; it was the whisper of Whispering Willie Wilde.

"For Pete's sake get me out! I been here since ten o'clock yestiddy morning."

Whispering Willie Wilde! Down there with the loot! For a fleeting second Rothert was even more frightened than before. His next sensation was one of immense relief.

His mind cleared and he reasoned with the speed of chain lightning. He realized that Wilde would not be dangerous at all. The man, marooned there for thirty-eight hours, must be as weak as a kitten. Having missed five successive meals, Wilde would hardly be able to offer fight.

"For Pete's sake get me out!" begged Willie Wilde from the darkness below.

As a drowning man clings to an oar he still clung desperately to Rothert's ankle.

In a flash Rothert saw the why of it. Of the doped trio, Wilde had first regained consciousness. Groggy, still half doped, he had arisen and stumbled along in the general direction of Cobrillo for help. With the *pozo* almost squarely in his path, he had stumbled in.

If so, why had not the posse seen his

footprints? The answer, thought Rothert, was that the posse had arrived in numbers and spent their immediate effort giving first aid to Murdock and Trueblood. Next, the coming and going tracks of the bandit car had absorbed all attention, being such an outstanding clue of flight as to overshadow all others. By that time the milling around of the posse would have made so many footprints in the dust that Wilde's wouldn't have drawn any attention whatever.

Why had they not heard him yelling from the *pozo?* Likely he had been lying down here, stunned by the fall. And at the best Willie's voice was only a husky whisper.

"I'm all in," whimpered Wilde from beneath the feet of Rothert. "Ain't you gonna get me out?"

"Yes," lied Rothert. "I'm one of Como No's search party, been looking for you since yesterday. Leggo my leg and I'll get you out."

"Hurry," whispered Willie Wilde.

But his grip held—like steel.

Rothert was more mad now than afraid. He kicked viciously with his free foot. He continued to kick, but somehow he could not land a kick in Willie's face.

"Dammit, leggo my leg!"

"I ain't got your leg. Get me out; I'm about dead. I'm—"

"You're pulling my leg off—leggo."

ROTHERT kicked again. Tenaciously the grip held. Why, the man must be looney already! Claimed he did not have hold of Rothert's leg! How the devil, wondered Rothert, could the fellow hold so firmly? The gripping palm seemed to have the strength of Sandow's rather than that of a half starved derelict.

Rothert realized there was only one thing to do. That was to get down flat footed on the bottom of the *pozo* and hit Wilde with his fist. That was the way you shook off a drowning man—and Wilde's plight of desperation was much similar.

So Rothert went on down the cleats. Down into the inky darkness he went, his free foot groping from cleat to cleat. In five steps more his boots touched the solid rock bottom of the hole. Then he kicked mightily.

"Leggo my leg!"

No answer from Wilde. Wilde seemed to have collapsed on the floor at Rothert's feet, still gripping with inexplicable strength the vandal's ankle. Rothert kicked again and again with his right boot. Why could he not crash a kick into Wilde's face? He felt him, but he could not kick him.

"Leggo!"

A savage fury was well nigh to overwhelming Rothert. He stopped to feel with his hands for the man, to punch him to submission. Dropping to his knees, he groped in the darkness; he flailed about with clenched fists. He groped and he beat the air. He could not land a blow. Damn Wilde! Was he ghoul or ghost, that he had no flesh? Yet the infernal grip held like st—

Damnation! It was steel. The grip was not simply *like* steel; it *was* steel. Snatching at his ankle to wrest it loose, Rothert felt no mortal fingers. He felt instead a firm circle of metal locked about his leg; in a flash he knew what it was—it was the chained cuff which the guard used to protect the bag of loot.

The money bag had been tossed into the *pozo*, chain and all. Rothert scrambled to his feet, groping for Wilde. He tripped, sprawled. It was the drag of the money bag which tripped him. He was shackled to it. Despair surged through Rothert.

He groped about, felt the cleated rope. It was shaking. A particle of falling rock hit Rothert in the eye. Some one was above him, climbing slowly and awkwardly up the chicken ladder.

Wilde! Wilde getting out! If Wilde got out, he would pull away the ladder and maroon Rothert.

So Rothert sprang onto the lowest cleat and snatched upward. He was just in time to touch a boot sole of Wilde's, as Wilde took one farther groping step up the cleats. Up went Rothert, snatching

frantically. Again his clutch merely grazed the sole of Wilde's boot.

Wilde was, obviously, as weak as a kitten. He was breathing heavily. It was plain that the ascension was taxing him to the last limit. Yet, though painfully slow was his progress upward toward the desert stars, it was no slower than Rothert's.

Because that infernal drag continued to pull upon Rothert's ankle. It clutched him like death. It weighed fifty pounds. It fairly paralyzed the leg to which it was shackled. How, then, could Rothert ascend more swiftly than Wilde?

As maddened as was his brain, Rothert clearly understood the shackle. Wilde must have known him for a thief returning to the cache of loot. Lacking the strength to fight, Wilde had simply clicked the chain's cuff on Rothert's foot.

They ascended the chicken ladder, Wilde always just barely out of the reach of Rothert. Rage blinded Rothert. Murder blackened his heart. If he could only grasp the chauffeur's putteed leg he would crash him heavily down to the floor of the pit.

On up those six meters of cleats they ascended, each man under his own handicap; Wilde faint from exposure, hunger and thirst, Rothert climbing with two hands and one foot, pulling up after him a dead weight of fifty pounds.

On toward the stars they climbed, in their several agonies of distress, and by his own length Whispering Willie Wilde reached first the *pozo's* rim.

When Rothert got his own chin over the rim he could not see Wilde at all. He could see the black hulk of his car. He could hear the thrum of his engine, which had been running all this tormenting while.

But he could not see Wilde?

Where was Wilde?

Where is a fish if there is water? Where is a dog if there is meat? Where is a starving chauffeur if a car is at hand, engine running? Whispering Willie Wilde was of course at the steering wheel, wondering if he could make the eight kilos to the Cobrillo mess hall in eight minutes flat.

A jerk. A mighty jerk on the chicken ladder as the car leaped forward like an unleashed greyhound.

The jerk, but for the cleats, would have slid the rope through Rothert's hands and dropped him back into the pit. But his arms were snagged on the cleats for one single second of time. Then he was free, hurtling through the air. He was catapulted out of the pit. As the rope snapped, he lighted on his chest eight feet from the hole, body, bag and all.

He got up to run. He tripped, sprawled. With choking sobs he watched his car fade into the desert night, toward the distant lights of Cobrillo.

He tore wildly at the chain. He clawed it. It mocked his effort, clung to his leg like grim death. He arose, struck out across the amber waste, dragging his penal ball and chain like a hopeless, helpless convict. It took him ten minutes to make a hundred miserable meters. The plunder of his plot, shackled to the very bone of him, dragged flat along the desert dust. When he stopped, it stopped. When he went, it went. Together they went onward into the desert night, linked in shameful despair.

He stopped and tore at it again, clawed until his fingers bled.

Then on he staggered, dragging one hundred and eighty thousand pesos of money. It was too much money. He wished it were less; he wished it were half; he wished it were none at all.

He could not get away with it. He fell at last, a vanquished vandal, prostrate upon the sour fruit of his crime—not fearful now that they would find him, fearful only that they would not. Yes, there they came. There came cars, lights, men, guided by the sotto vociferations of Whispering Willie Wilde.

S. B. H. HURST

brings back to us

"Bugs" Sinnat,

ace of the Indian

Secret Service

"SAHIB, sahib!" The servant was apologetic but insistent. "I told the sahib that you gave orders that you desired to sleep late, but still the sahib would not go away. Indeed, he would have forced his way past me and awakened you himself had I not come hither. What was I, a poor man, to do?"

Horace Sinnat, Indian Secret Service, 006 Domestic, opened his eyes and frowned severely, but there was a grin on his lips that heartened the old club bearer.

"Is the sahib quite sober, do you think, Rammyswami?"

The old servant grinned, but his aged brain reacted to the habit of years.

"How would I, a poor man, know or understand the ways of sahibs, when—"

Sinnat, known to a few intimates as Bugs, laughed.

"You know more about the ways of sahibs than they do themselves. I ask you, is the sahib sober?"

"But, sahib, it is but six A.M. in the morning of the rising sun, and—"

"So sahibs are always sober in the morning, eh, Rammyswami? Who is this importunate sahib who dares to waken me thus?"

"The *burra thana!*"

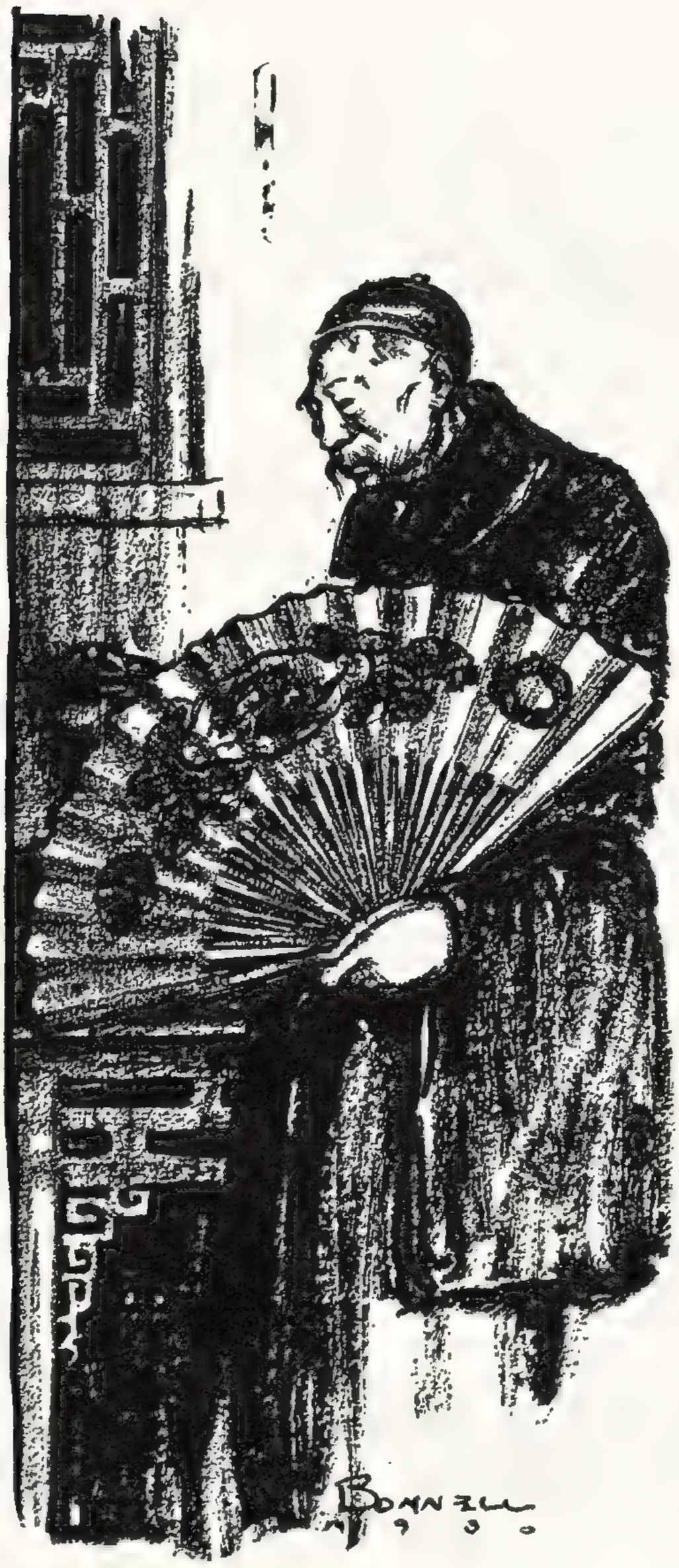
"The superintendent of police, eh?" Bugs dropped his jovial air. "Show him in."

But the superintendent of police did not wait to be shown. He was at the door as Bugs spoke. He came in, and Rammyswami discreetly vanished.

"We need you, Bugs!" exclaimed Smithes, the superintendent.

"You often do," growled Bugs. "But I am in no mood to help—I want to sleep."

"But—"



The Tiger Hashishin

and I am going to take a holiday in bed. If the husband of a Hindu wife is howling in the police station that a Mohammedan has stolen that wife—well, get the man another wife, or something. Only, don't ask me to do it."

"But, Bugs—it's the viceroy!"

"Do you mean to tell me—" Bugs spoke with great severity. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me, Smithes, that the viceroy of India has stolen the wife of a low caste Hindu, or—"

"Bugs, stop it! Quit fooling. The viceroy told me to see you. He said that you were the only man in India fit to take the case. That it goes beyond police powers. Wires me from Simla to ask you to take hold, and for us to do nothing unless you order it."

"The viceroy always does show his intelligence, doesn't he?" Bugs laughed. "But what is it?"

Smithes sat down by the bed.

"It's damn queer, Bugs, but it's this: When the sun rose today, in four places in India a white man's head was found on a post in a prominent place in all four of them. The heads were still bleeding, newly cut off. The bodies were found nearby—left carelessly where they were

"Damn it, Smithes, the last administrative report to the home government pleaded that the police service in India was a blot—howled for more money and men. Home government has done nothing—probably won't—"

"But, Bugs—"

"Let me finish. I am getting very tired of the poaching of the police. The secret service has too much to do, as it is. Besides, you always pick on me. Now, Smithes, go away. This is my birthday

killed. A concerted murder; four white men killed and beheaded at practically the same moment in four widely separated places. One was stuck on the old gate in Delhi; one was in front of the old Government House in Calcutta; another grinned horribly in front of the Club of Western India in Poona; and the other, of all places, was on a pole in the ground near the pagoda in Moulmein. Four heads, hundreds of miles apart, killed in the same manner. Knives, no bullets. Murdered at the same time.

"The viceroy wired me to see you quietly and ask you to take charge. Fancy the viceroy taking action that way! You are in charge, the police of India under your orders . . . Isn't it the devil of a business? As our American friend Williams, my assistant, said, 'It's like finding a head in San Francisco, another in Fairbanks, Alaska, another in New Orleans and another in New York—all at the same time, and all killed the same way!' "

Bugs was dressing.

"All right, I'll take over. Don't let it get you, as Williams would say . . ."

Then Bugs sent a telegram to the different police heads:

MAKE NO FUSS. DON'T PLAY THE THING UP OR ARREST ANYBODY ON SUSPICION. WIRE ANYTHING FOR ME CARE OF LORD CAMERON, GOVERNOR OF BURMA, AT RANGOON

Then Bugs disappeared.

SMITHES had wakened him in the Bombay Club, in Bombay. Two hours later the secret service man dropped out of sight. Rangoon is, of course, a long way from Bombay, but the police assumed from his telegram that Bugs had gone there. There was some difference of opinion about this, because the only head discovered in Burma had been found at Moulmein, and Moulmein is quite a way from Rangoon—across the Gulf of Martaban. It was Smithes who discovered that Bugs had not been seen at Rangoon, and it was Smithes who wired the various police departments that he feared Bugs had met with foul play.

Smithes had evolved a theory concerning the heads, which he wired in code to Bugs, care of Lord Cameron. To his surprise and dismay Cameron wired back that Bugs had not been in Rangoon for some months—the governor had not seen the secret service man for six months. This was three weeks after Smithes had wakened Bugs in the Bombay Club.

Smiths looked across his desk at Williams.

"Damn queer, eh?"

"Not so queer," answered Williams gravely. "Looks to me as if the gang that did the murders got poor old Bugs. Maybe Bugs figured the thing out and went after the leader of the gang. The gang got him. Think how smart that gang must be, Smithes. And what an organization! Just think of it. For it must be the same gang that killed and beheaded all four men—and was so well organized that it could do all four murders hundreds of miles apart at exactly the same time. I am worried about Bugs."

"A telegram, sar."

A clerk, a Bengali *babu*, came into the office with the message. Smithes snatched at it. He read it and turned pale.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed.

"About Bugs?" asked Williams anxiously.

"No," answered Smithes. "It says that four more white heads were found this morning. Same as the others in murder details. Only this time one was found in front of Lord Cameron's office in Rangoon, another on the breakwater in Madras harbor, one on the Mall at Simla, and the other on Chowringee Road, in Calcutta again. Williams, what are we coming to?"

"Hell!" answered Williams. "And the murderers got Bugs . . ."

Smithes indorsed this opinion, and wired it to all police superintendents. They disregarded Bugs' orders and began arresting natives, all over India, on suspicion—with no result other than threats

of damage suits. No clues whatever. The heads were all identified, and their variety added to the puzzle.

And Bugs had disappeared. Dropped out of sight without even taking the trouble to ask the police to send him the identification of the heads, which work was completed shortly after he left Bombay. This, argued the police, proved that he had been killed—no doubt by the same gang—very soon after leaving.

Then came the startling happening.

A head was found in the early morning, stuck on a post in the center of the Maidan, the great park of Calcutta. It was the head of Bugs, but—a wax image of him!

"That proves him dead," growled Williams, "if further proof were needed. They got him. He must have gone right into their den. They figured he was some sort of policeman when he tried to get them. After killing him they made certain by washing off his disguise. Why a wax head? That's easy. Two reasons. The first is that Bugs put up such a fight that his head was battered so much that the gang—knowing Bugs was a policeman and wanting to show their contempt for the police by sticking his head on a post—could not use it with any certainty that it would be recognized. The other reason was that Bugs was killed in Burma. Or else some place so far from Calcutta that transporting the head was impossible. Too dangerous a job, and the head would not keep. So they had a wax image made of it—by one of the gang, I guess.

"Then, of course, to throw any police that happened to have brains off the track—how they flattered us!—they took the head to Calcutta. If that gang is ever rounded up its headquarters will be found in Burma, you'll see. That's why Bugs went there. He was going to Rangoon, but they got him first."

Almost a reign of terror. Men— Englishmen—no longer went out alone at night—two or three, or more, together always. The newspapers printed more or less inaccurate biographies of the famous Horace Sinnat, and their readers, and the world of India, at last saw the likeness of a man they had been hearing of for years, but had never seen. At last there was no reason why Bugs' picture could not be printed. The police theory proved him dead.

"It's no theory at all; Sinnat is dead," the police told the editors. "No reason to keep his picture out of print—if you can get one. Besides, he should be honored as a man who has died for his country!"

II

A POOR box-walla, a pedler of low caste, a person of small finances and somewhat dirty, Bugs had entered a second class carriage of the Bombay to Calcutta train with that cringing manner so peculiar to box-wallas. As he was trying to make himself comfortable—an impossible feat—among a motley crowd of natives which filled the car beyond its supposed capacity, four other natives resented his taking what they said was the best corner. One plucked his sleeping mat away, another tumbled his provision pans. Four would-be tough natives, to whom any box-walla was fair game because he would take anything mildly—otherwise he would not be a box-walla.

"It is the business of a pedler to accept insult every time he tries to sell anything," exclaimed he who pulled at Bugs' mat.

"Box-wallas are dirt under the feet of men of decent caste," chimed in another.

But Bugs, who could stand anything that came in the line of duty—even a railroad journey from Bombay to Calcutta second class in the hot weather—decided that since he had several days to put in with these people it was advisable that he cease to be a box-walla. So he promptly knocked the man whose paws were on his mat across the car. Then he severely kicked the others, so that they howled for mercy. Bugs was very hot and irritable. He knew that this un-box-walla action would make him conspicuous—something he seldom wished to become—but, nevertheless, he beat up the four. Then he

talked to them, so that the other natives rejoiced.

"Do you creatures take me for a Christian?" he asked. "Box-walla, eh? Well, if just now I am a pedler am I one beneath my clothes? After two years in jail, where I had to fight a Pathan or two every day—without weapons because the English do not allow convicts to have weapons—to kill you animals with my hands would be both easy and amusing. If I do kill you I shall only be sent back to jail again, where I will be well fed. Now, until we reach our destination, wherever that is, you obey me as my servant. *Sumester!*"

"*Um junta—um junta!*" came the chorus, not one of the four daring to get up lest he be knocked down again.

"Ah," exploded an old woman. "They admit they understand."

"Yes, mother," said Bugs politely. "And if they do not, they are going to be taught . . . Cattle of the dregs!" he addressed the four men. "You will also obey this lady, and wait on her. It would be enjoyment to kill you, but if you obey me on the run then will I not hit you any more, because it is inadvisable to maim one's servants!"

With that, Bugs came into his kingdom —which extended from Bombay to Calcutta and over the space of some days. At the Howrah railway station he bade his servants, the old lady and about twenty others, a fantastic *adieu*, crossed the bridge to the Calcutta side and walked swiftly along the river road to the Hastings *ghat*. During the journey there had been considerable chatter and speculation, of the wildest sort, concerning the heads; but the natives in the carriage had only talked of the heads when they had nothing else to interest them. Bugs had gained nothing from the talk.

He went on board a small steamer, the *Shahjehan*, at the *ghat*. The steamer was about to leave. Much bustle. Many native deck passengers on deck. Freight. *Colashe* sailors running about and cursing as they tumbled over passenger paraphernalia. With the *secunnies*—native quartermasters—busy, Bugs had no difficulty making his way to the bridge deck and the door of the captain's cabin. The boat was one of the three plying between Calcutta and Rangoon. The captain, writing at his table, was startled to see a dirty pedler standing in the doorway, and was about to say something calculated to make the man run away, when the pedler said quietly:

"For the love of Mike, Edge, let me through to your bathroom. If I don't get a white man's bath and drink right away I'll explode!"

The captain got up quickly, shut the door and brought out a bottle of whisky, all in one motion.

"Go to it, Bugs," he said.

"I turn up in this disreputable fashion so often that you never seem surprised." Bugs grinned. "Lucky to get your boat, though—I don't know the other captains."

So, in this way and with some comfort, Bugs got to Rangoon. But he did not stay there, or talk to any one. Instead, he went at once to the railway station and took a train for Pegu. Pegu is the old capital of Lower Burma, and about fifty miles from Rangoon. Bugs got there in the evening. The train pulled through the ancient walls, which are nearly fifty feet thick, and into the station. Bugs got off and joined the crowds of natives in the street. The time of the evening meal was approaching. The incense of cooking fires. And the great Swe-ma-daw pagoda, the largest and most holy pagoda in Burma, raising its lofty head through the purple night toward the stars like a benign majesty guarding tiny humanity.

BUGS walked toward the very poorest part of the old city, feeling tired. Try as he would, he could figure out no reasonable theory to fit the facts of the widely separated heads. He could see nothing for it but a prolonged and tiresome investigation, with perhaps failure as his reward. Those extraordinary beheadings . . . What motive could lie behind

them? One beheading might be a revenge for private wrong, or the work of a maniac. But four, at the same time, and so far apart—what could one deduce from that? Nothing . . .

"My brain is a graveyard of unrelated ideas," muttered Bugs, as he turned into a narrow street of broken wooden huts.

In all the world no street of greater poverty exists. Wan faces peering out from empty doorways. Sickness and grief the household gods, accepted with the resignation of fatalism. Bugs hurried forward to the end of the street where, just before he came to the abandoned Buddhist burial ground, he saw among the shadows a wizened little man sitting in front of the last hut, playing with a basket of snakes.

The little man tensed and sniffed eagerly as he heard Bugs coming. He dropped his snakes and peered with bright, bird-like eyes. The velvet dark seemed transparent to him, as he made a queer noise in his throat which brought ten other little men from the hut. At the same moment, as Bugs reached the hut, and after a swift scrutiny of the dark to see that nobody was watching, the snake man knelt before Bugs, clasped his knees and mumbled joyfully—

"My father and my mother has come back to me."

"Are all my children well?" asked Bugs as the little men thronged about him and escorted him into the hut.

They were very well.

The snake man, who was the boss, gave orders for a meal. For many years these men had been Bugs' own private secret service. Originally there had been twelve, but one, known as the dog man, had given his life for Bugs. Their ideas were of the jungle, but their courage and loyalty were of the gods. The hut was their headquarters, not because of poverty —because Bugs paid them well—but because the living of such jungle men in better quarters would have attracted attention; furthermore, it would have made the men themselves unhappy.

They turned away their faces respectfully as Bugs ate. He told them of the finding of the four heads, of which they had not heard, as they could not read or write.

"And who will have done this thing—these four things?" asked Bugs.

The little men laughed heartily.

"Nay, sahib—for our father knows that we can do everything except think. How shall we know? Let our father, the sahib, rest him and then think for a space; he will then know who killed the bodies of the heads."

"We will sleep for awhile," responded Bugs. "Then we start for Moulmein, where one of the heads was found."

"Very good, sahib. We will sleep for awhile. Like dogs we smell for the hunting."

They left the hut before dawn. They had to take another train, then a boat across the gulf. After rounding the island, passing under the great trees with their colonies of monkeys, they could see the golden pagoda of Moulmein looking serenely down upon the wide creek where the elephants work like men, demanding their stated hours of rest, and where, at an old wooden wharf, two small coast steamers were loading teak logs.

"We will meet together, at the time of the evening meal, near the hollow rock of Mai-byan," said Bugs. "The sun is now two hours up. Scatter and listen, but talk not about the heads. Tomorrow we may begin to talk more—or not, if it seems best."

But that night, when Bugs met with his little men at the hollow rock of Mai-byan, at the time of the evening meal, he was disappointed that they, like himself, had learned nothing all that day. Forthwith he decided to change the scene of his operations.

"We wend a weary trail," he said to his men. "But, my children, we follow to the end. We now go to Calcutta, where also a head was found."

They took deck passage on one of the coast steamers, and a few days later reached the mouth of the Hooghly River. Bugs, hanging around in the guise of a

disreputable native, heard the news the pilot brought on board at the Sandheads. Four more heads had been found—the second four. Bugs heard, went forward and sat down on the forecastle head. Out of the "graveyard of unrelated ideas" in his brain had come a ghost. Nebulous, weird, intangible, but with the ghost an idea. The secret service man was stirred. He felt altogether different. That second head found in Calcutta! That and, out of the years, the ghost.

Then, three days later, the wax image of his own head was found on the Calcutta Maidan. That finding upset the nation. But the very next week something happened that sent the nation into a sort of panic. Williams, the American assistant of Smithes, disappeared utterly.

Bugs, then Williams. Who would be next? Smithes became almost a nervous wreck. The newspapers railed at the police—voicing the sentiments of their readers. If an assistant superintendent of police could be kidnapped from his own office and most likely murdered, as Bugs had been murdered, what was the *thana* coming to? What was the use of having police to protect the people if the police could not protect themselves? Sarcastic editorials and worse than sarcastic telegrams.

Apparently the last man in Bombay to see Williams—and no one had seen him elsewhere—was one of the *babu* police clerks. He was heard to say that the night before he disappeared, Williams had looked and acted queerly.

Smithes sent for the *babu*. The *babu* wept, as if he expected to be blamed for the entire affair.

"What's this about Williams sahib looking queer? What do you mean by saying such things?" growled Smithes.

"But, sahib—" the *babu* got hold of himself—"Meester Williams looked, like I said, queer. I have been afraid ever since. At the time I did not think much of what he said—beyond the apologetic notion that the distinguished assistant superintendent had been overdrinking. Of his strange, not to say weird, mutterings, I would not make a burden for your intelligence—if it were not for the fact that he has disappeared. You see, sar, the man was beside himself about third base!"

"Third base?" repeated the astounded Smithes. "What do you mean?"

"He kept muttering, sar, did the Williams gentleman, about 'Third base; Third base.' Like that; and, 'A hit will do it! Fine! Clever, but a bit hard on the catcher!' . . . That sort of talk, like delirious, sar."

"He was talking about an American game called baseball, *babu*," said Smithes. "It is not played in India, although I have seen it attempted at home. It is a typically American game, which no other nation can ever hope to understand. The entire country of America goes mad every year about it. I can understand the mutterings of Mr. Williams—he had, no doubt, seen in an American paper an account of some big game. But that does not help us to find him. And tracing, or trying to trace, telephone calls has brought nothing. Damned clerks seem all gummed up at the exchange. *Babu* operators," he finished under his breath.

The *babu* went back to his books. The entire force of police sought Williams.

But they did not have any success.

What actually caused Williams to disappear was a letter he received at the club. It came in a pink, scented envelop, and was marked personal—confidential. But while Williams had numerous lady friends, the writing on the envelop was strange to him. He opened it.

> Got to 3rd. Job Charnock pitching. Need a hit at once to bring me home. Your turn at bat. Don't talk to catcher. Burn.
>
> —HEMIPTER

Williams read this queer message. For some time it meant nothing to him. He committed it to memory and burned it. That part was obvious enough. He walked over to his office at headquarters, still puzzling. Then, of a sudden, he saw light. He grinned, chuckled and babbled of third base. The astounded *babu* watched him apprehensively. Williams

became more excited. The *babu* began to believe he had a touch of the sun. Then Williams left his own office and rummaged around among the books and records in another section. There he apparently found something that made him queerer than ever. In fact, he did a little heel and toe dancing—which, in the temperature of Bombay at that time of the year, or at any time, was a queer proceeding for an assistant superintendent of police on duty. He stopped dancing and walked across toward the *babu*. The *babu* furtively reached for his ruler. But Williams, still grinning inanely, only stared at the *babu* as if he were not there. For a second, though, the *babu* believed that the assistant superintendent was going to say something to him.

Williams then left the office and was not seen again.

III

THE NATIVE who entered the Chinese store at about noon, in Calcutta, was apparently a box-walla, or pedler, of indeterminate age; and the atmosphere of that store made Calcutta seem young. Jade and sandalwood, old ivory, carvings, weird joss faces, the gods of the elderly race. Cool shade in which devils and dragons seemed to move among the shadows. At that hour the shop was empty, save for the old Chinese, the owner, who had seemingly just awakened from sleep. He came forward slowly.

"Peace be upon this house. I bow to your excellent and most honorable ancestors," said the pedler with grave courtesy, in fluent Mandarin Chinese.

The astounded Chinese bent almost double, with a sort of automatic delight. But bewilderment was in his eyes as he straightened up and began—

"The honor is mine—"

"The eyes of my old friend are tired," interrupted the amazing box-walla. "Else that penetrating mind behind those eyes had seen, through the somewhat dirty curtains of my disguise, one who in years gone by, and for many years, he called Hoorace!"

"My friend! My friend!" exclaimed the old man delightedly. "I beg you to forgive me. My eyes did indeed err. But for that blame the cleverness of my friend in disguises. The eyes erred, but my soul is glad. Enter, I beg you, my poor abode—beyond the articles for trade. My soul is glad and my house honored. This ancient chair—will you please to be seated? Now, I am at your command."

"There has never been a tong war or any trouble among the Chinese in Calcutta," said Bugs. "What is your opinion about these murders—the heads found so variously?"

The Chinese spread out his hands.

"I have none. I only know that no Chinese has anything to do with it."

"I didn't think they had," said Bugs. "My reference to no tong trouble was meant to stress the good behavior of your countrymen. There used to be a man among your followers who modeled excellently in wax."

"He is still in Calcutta," replied the Chinese, wonderingly.

"I have trusted you with many things, for twenty years," went on Bugs. "I now trust you with my head."

The Chinese smiled and bowed.

"My friend in some way jests. Yet, if indeed your head is in danger, I will protect it. Merely for privacy, my countrymen have built them in places underground—catacombs unknown to the police, unknown to any one but we Chinese. But you are free of them."

"I thank you. But I have mixed my talk. What I want is for you to send for the man who models in wax, because I want a wax model of my head. I will explain more fully, later."

"At once will I send for the artist," responded the Chinese.

The wax modeler was a fast worker, and clever. Like all Chinese artists his fidelity to detail was marvelous. Every wrinkle, every mark on Bugs' face—almost the exact number of hairs on his head

—was faithfully copied. Then the torn neck and the stains of blood.

Bugs carried this precious relic in a gunny sack to a dirty godown which the snake man had rented back of the Chowringee bazar. His goings and comings and the movements of his men had excited neither interest nor attention among the low caste people of that street. Bugs and his henchmen were merely poor men, probably thieves, sharing a filthy hut and splitting the rent among them.

Night, noisy night, moved its twisted and immoral ways about that smelly part of the city when Bugs sat on an empty kerosene box, stenciled Bayonne, New Jersey, and trained his guns for action.

"Behold!"

Very carefully he took the head out of the sack and removed the tissue wrappings.

The little men hissed their excitement. They gesticulated like monkeys that had learned to control their chatterings.

"The snake man and I will in a few hours take this to that place on the Maidan I pointed out to you all this morning. Two hours before the dawn you will move rapidly about the parts of the city I have detailed to you, and spread in excited voice the grim news that another white man's head has been found —on the Maidan at a certain place. This news, of course, to natives only. You will avoid speaking to white men. The police are the last people I wish to see arrive at the exhibition.

"Do this with all your care and skill, for this head of wax is all the ammunition I have—to fire at an enemy I have never seen and concerning whom I know nothing whatever. Very well. But you must hasten, because it is most important that you are all among the first to arrive to view the head. Get this clearly. Spread the tale, then run for the place on the Maidan where the head is. You will then take your separate stations and watch, as you have so often done before. Watch closely. A big crowd of natives will arrive and look and make much talk. They will stand about, still chattering, waiting to see what will happen. They will, of course, not dream of touching the head. They will wait, very excited, for the police to arrive.

"I will send no word to the police, but will let nature take its course. So the crowd will grow—watching avidly, talking, wondering, and so on. But I am hoping that not all will stay to watch, not all will wait to see what the police will do when they come. No; unless I am aiming this head at nothing I hope that some of the crowd of natives—one, or two, or maybe three—will take one good look at the wax head and then slink away. These may slink away or turn away with indifference—I do not know. Neither does it matter. The point is: those who go will be acting differently from the crowd of natives whose only interest in the head is curiosity! Different feelings, mental reactions to the head, will such have as slink away.

"So, follow such men. As you love me, follow those who leave the scene. Follow and mark where they go—especially if to any house. There may be one, or two, or three, who depart after one look. But you yourselves know so well that any natives who do so depart will be acting most unusually. So, follow such men. There are eleven of you. Follow and mark, but be unseen as ghosts. Now, let us rest for an hour, and then to work!"

DURING that brief period when Calcutta tries to be cool, and sometimes the temperature drops below eighty, ten remarkable little men left the godown and scattered variously and volubly—elemental children, gnomes delightedly gloating as they told of another white man's head stuck on a post on the Maidan. News, particularly such news, travels through the Calcutta bazars like fire through dry ferns, and since the brain of every native not under the influence of opium seems to act like a radio receiving set, and at times like a broadcasting station, the tale of the white man's head spread widely.

Bugs and the snake man were on the

lonely Maidan before the news roused a people who are always about early. The centuries have bred in them the reaction to the cool hour. And as the dark melted into dusk, and the dusk suddenly melted in a ball of fire that smote the River Hooghly like an underworld demon of hateful heat, Bugs and the snake man watched a great multitude gathering. But while fingers itched to touch it, the head remained inviolate as a taboo. With the gathering crowd, on its outskirts like shepherd dogs, came the ten elemental men of the jungle; men who remembered people by their smell when met again after many years.

Bugs watched closely; but sharp as his eyes were, the eyes of the snake man were as fast as the eyes of the reptiles he loved and worshiped.

The glare of the pitiless sun upon the park; a crowd of natives who chattered. Was this wild thing of a head another statue the insane sahibs were erecting? A not unreasonable notion, since everywhere in the Maidan, even on the roads, are statues to great English dead. Bugs, a very dirty box-walla, lifted his voice in low class Hindustani, supporting that wild idea.

"The rabble once cut off the head of an English king, Charles, and this to his memory!"

His hearers looked at him with sober acceptance of the wild suggestion.

The snake man plucked once, unseen, at his arm. His eyes pointed with the accuracy of a digit finger.

"Follow that one," whispered Bugs, in hill Burmese.

The snake man had detected a native who was slinking away, and Bugs, who now saw the man, and who could almost read minds from actions, felt quite certain that the native followed by the snake man had looked upon the wax head differently from the rest of the crowd, and departed to take a tale regarding it to some one interested.

Some Englishmen, out for a ride, broke through the ring of natives and stared with them. Then a burly white policeman:

"Out of my way, chattering magpies! What! Now what the hell is that thing doing there?"

"It's not real, Clingan," shouted one of the Englishmen, who knew the policeman. "It's a new sort of scarecrow."

"Well—" the policeman scratched his head— "there are more crows and bramly-kites around the Calcutta Maidan and the river than anywhere else in the world —so why not scarecrows? But what is there to scare? And why a wax head? I don't know whether to remove the ghastly thing or not. At first I thought it was another real one."

The English were silent. They had also thought that way. And they were as badly puzzled as the officer. They had laughed, but under the laugh was genuine concern.

Then there came along the Red Road a bright and big car; in it was a portly man. The car stopped. The portly man, a member of the Bengal Council, beckoned the policeman and inquired the reason for the crowd.

"Maybe you better see for yourself, sir," answered the officer. "It's fair got me puzzled."

The portly man got out of his car and walked across the sun baked grass. He approached the wax head.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "It's Sinnat!" He bit his lip at the indiscretion, then whispered to the policeman. Aloud he said, "It's some sort of ghastly joke, Officer. Take it off the post and bring it to my car. I am going by the police station and will give you a lift. That's the place for such rotten jokes as this."

Bugs grinned. Busy watching and listening, he had seen his men follow natives who had moved away. But none had moved as had moved the man the snake man had followed. Bugs took a deep breath. The crowd was dispersing.

"It worked," he muttered. "Unless all the intuition I have and all the experience of these people I have gained amounts to nothing—I have a clue."

He walked away. His old friend the Chinese merchant had invited him to

breakfast. Approaching the shop, Bugs met the snake man.

"You report quickly," said Bugs. "The fellow did not go far, then?"

"I waited for my father, since he did tell me he would eat here," said the snake man. "Right behind you is the house into which the man who slunk away from the head hurried. No need to turn your head, sahib. From the Cheene house you can look."

"Go back to the godown," whispered Bugs, considerably startled. "Get the report from the other ten of what they did, and who they followed, and where. Then have *that* house watched closely, and every move of the man you followed duly noted—where he goes and when and so on—and keep me informed."

The snake man glided away, and Bugs entered the shop of the old Chinese.

That breakfast was a work of art, in food, service and courtesy. The old man treated Bugs as if the secret service agent had been Emperor of China. After it was over Bugs pointed to the house across the street.

"Who lives there?" he asked casually.

The Chinese seemed surprised.

"Natives. Rich, I imagine. But surely you jest. For how would I, of an alien race, know anything about the privacy and people of that house? It is, of course, a very old house, from which few people seem to come or go."

"You spoke of catacombs; something like the ones in San Francisco, I suppose?" suggested Bugs.

The Chinese smiled.

"Neither so large nor so much occupied," he said. "The Chinese population of Calcutta has no such reason for hiding. We have the underground places just because we like them. But if I, or any one, desire to smoke opium, we may do so on our own doorsteps,—which is good law. It is the hidden and suppressed things of the world that are dangerous."

"Just so," said Bugs.

He seemed very thoughtful.

"Old friend, I know I can trust you with my life. I am engaged on a matter much more important than that—in which the farther I go the more useless do the police appear to become. Nay, I am not criticizing. The police are bound by law to act in certain ways. For instance, no policeman dare come in this store of yours in the way of his duty, unless he actually saw a crime committed or he had a warrant . . .

"Do these underground burrowings of your people go anywhere near to that house across the way?"

The old Chinese nodded with understanding.

"Within a hundred feet of being under that house," he answered.

"Ah!" said Bugs. "And the Chinese coolie never talks—particularly when a high born like yourself bids him not to talk . . . About fifty of them!"

"I can get them, and put them at your service," nodded the Chinese. "It is an honor to break the law for you."

Bugs laughed.

"Our police would be horrified. Of course, I could compel them to enter that house, but that would be like throwing stones at a fish you want to catch. British police are sometimes too law abiding, and usually very clumsy. Nay, I do not criticize—merely state a fact that you of China know very well."

The Chinese laughed.

"American police are more—what is the word, old friend, Hoorace?"

Bugs looked at his old friend, twinkling.

"Have initiative, eh? But that gives me an idea. I thank you for that word American—for I need such a man. I believe you write English?"

Again the Chinese laughed.

"Of a kind the copy books would teach; it lacks individuality."

"All the better." Bugs grinned. "Now, please, write me a letter. I will tell you what to write. Ah, yes! Use fancy paper—pink, and scent it heavily!"

Bugs chuckled happily.

The Chinese took pen and paper of the sort made and used by educated natives; Bugs walked slowly to and fro, meditating upon the letter he was about to dictate.

IV

THE CALCUTTA railway station is at Howrah, which is on the other side of the River Hooghly from Calcutta. Bugs, who had walked across the long bridge in his bare feet—still a poor box-walla—watched the people leaving the station, just off the cross-country train from Bombay. He saw one who wore a broken solar topee, and soiled white duck coat and pants—that nondescript outfit of the poor white. The man needed a shave and had evidently traveled second class, which is pretty horrible traveling in India. He looked about him sharply, expectantly. He pushed the broken pith hat back on his head and wiped his face. He turned with a start as a native box-walla whispered at his elbow—

"Nice work, Williams!"

Williams stared haughtily. "I don't want to buy anything," he said loudly.

"Hate to ask you to walk after that hell of a train ride," the box-walla whispered, "but follow me. I have a Chinese friend in whose place you will find the coolness and delight of the ten thousand poppy gardens!"

The box-walla walked off, and Williams followed. He was a strong young man, but he certainly hated to walk in that heat, although he recognized the need of walking. He tingled pleasurably at Bugs' words. Williams had done good work, both in deciphering that cryptic note on pink paper, and in his unpretentious disguise of a nondescript white man.

He followed Bugs into the store of the old Chinese. Through the store and into the private place. Bugs introduced Williams.

Williams said:

"Say, Bugs, that letter was a wow. A phone or wire would have left tracks. But it sure had me guessing. I thought you were dead, you know, and so did everybody else. Then that crazy note. But 'got to third' and the need of a hit meant I was wanted to help. But while that seemed plain, I couldn't for the life of me figure who had sent the note. Never saw the writing before. Then 'Job Charnock pitching'; I got a ray of light when I remembered that Job was the guy who founded Calcutta some centuries ago. So, somebody wanted help in Calcutta. But who was it? I began to wonder. Perhaps you were not dead. I got all fussed up and burned the letter. Maybe you were not dead. I began to see light when I realized that 'catcher' meant Smithes, the policeman. A policeman catches people—or is paid to. Then I rummaged among the books in the office. I was feeling sure the letter was from you. Got the big dictionary, but couldn't find Hemipter. That's Latin, I guess.

"Then I got a flash. If the letter was from you this Hemipter was the signature. I just tore into that dictionary until I got the word 'bug'. There wasn't any plural—didn't need one because bugs—all bugs, I guess—is or are *hemipter!*

"Believe I scared the *babu* into a fit. Saw him glide his hand toward his ruler when I was doing a sort of song and dance. I just disappeared—not a word to the catcher or anybody. Gave them a hell of a scare. In the paper. Hard on Smithes, but of course there was nothing else for it— And you're on third. Pretty close to a solution, eh?"

"Nice work, Williams—man after my own heart. Yes, if not close I am on the track. You and I—or, at any rate, I—am going to become a burglar for the benefit of India and the white race. You know of course how sacred is the privacy of a native home in this country. That letter was crazy, as you say, but it was the best I could do. You were the only intelligent man I could think of as willing to break the police regulations. And I didn't want the police to know I am alive—they might start looking for me. That might be fatal. I am dealing with something very horrible and very subtle—and very old. The second murder in Calcutta was my first hint. From my wax head I got the lead I expected."

"But is that all the clue you have?" asked Williams.

"I wouldn't call it a clue—a lead. Perhaps—" Bugs spoke reflectively— "the better word is bait. It's deep water, Williams. Very deep. Let us go downstairs. Things seen are mightier than things heard, as the poet said, and I have something to show you as well as tell you."

"You have done a lot of thinking," said Williams. "More of that than you are telling me. And you know so much of India, its religions and its history, that you find clues to strange crimes in your own head—out of your knowledge and experience."

"Down this step and turn to the right. I will tell you more later on. Just now don't raise your voice above a whisper."

Bugs handed Williams a flashlight and took one himself. The old Chinese smiled blandly, paternally at them. Then they went down a step, two steps. Then their feet met a gradual incline of earth, along which men might run swiftly and silently without danger of tripping. Down, down, the flashlights showing as it were the entrance to a deserted place of damp, earth smelling dungeons.

However, a few feet farther showed anything but dungeons. Luxuriously furnished rooms, through which Bugs and Williams passed.

"This is of course a private affair of the Chinese, into which we will not be so rude as to inquire," whispered Bugs. "Farther along we will find two Chinese on guard."

"On guard?" gasped Williams.

Bugs paused. Then:

"Let us rest here in this room where I may talk to you without having to resort to whispering, Williams. It may be better than trying to explain when I show you what I have to show you.

"THE CHINESE are all my friends," explained Bugs to Williams. "My old friend upstairs is practically their king here in Calcutta, and they do whatever he orders. I have subsidized fifty of them —very grim and dangerous fighting men —whom you are to lead when the time comes. Of course there is no danger of their betraying us—even if they knew more than the old gentleman upstairs has seen fit to tell them, which they don't. Neither do they care. The government is going to pay higher wages to certain Chinese than it ever expected to do!

"But that is all by the way of detail. I have a tale to tell you, Williams—a tale! Some years ago, when I was younger in the service, and quite unknown, and you were far too young to enter police service —in those days there was a very brilliant secret service man named Sinclair. He was quite elderly, as secret service men go; about fifty. He was born in India, right here in Calcutta, and had never lived anywhere else, his father being an army officer, killed in the Mutiny.

"You maybe flattered me just now about my knowledge. Sinclair knew so much more than I do that there is no comparison between us. His knowledge, however, was specialized—entirely about Bengal. Mine is more diffuse—Burma, Afghanistan, and so on. I was a young man then, and Sinclair took a fancy to me and told me much. He had some magnificent theories and ideas. Some of the men of that day in the service made fun of Sinclair's ideas—when he was not there to listen, of course, because no one wanted either to hurt his feelings or to face his temper. You see, poor old Sinclair had one awful weakness, and as the years went by the other men decided that his weakness had made him—oh, well, weak minded in some ways. I do not think they were correct in that opinion. Anyway, Sinclair smoked opium, to excess.

"His most magnificent—and most derided—theory, was that here in Calcutta is an underground place, where lives a Tiger Hashishin; and if we could find that place and get that brute, and his gang of maybe a hundred, we would have the solution of dozens of unsolved murders—of white men and women! And Sinclair said before he died he would find that place, and the head of that gang.

"Sounds a bit wild, doesn't it? Well, Williams, I was transferred to Burma.

The night I left I said goodby to Sinclair. He looked wild, excited, hurried.

" 'I wouldn't tell any one else, Bugs,' he said, 'but I have located that underground Calcutta place, and tonight I am going there!'

" 'But,' I said, 'won't you take some one with you, or at least leave word where the place is?'

"I asked lightly, Williams, because Sinclair was positively drunk with opium—he ate it as well as smoked it—and I thought he was talking through the drug and that his words meant little or nothing.

" 'No, Bugs,' he answered, 'I go alone, and the credit shall be all mine. I know the other men have laughed at old Sinclair behind his back. After this night I will have the last laugh. Goodby and good luck, Bugs.'

"So, Williams, we said goodby. And I never saw him again. Neither did any one else, so far as is known. Sinclair went out that night, alone. I have told you what he told me before he went. He disappeared. The most mysterious affair in the history of the service. We moved heaven and earth to find a trace of him, of course. But nothing. Sinclair went out alone, as he told me, to this underground place of age and mystery. Since that night the number of unsolved murder mysteries has more than doubled, as you perhaps know.

"Well, Williams, I am going to imitate Sinclair. Only, I am going to have you and the Chinese handy! For the old fellow was correct about his underground mystery. You asked me a few minutes ago if the following of that native was all the clue I had—if his being shadowed to the house across the street was all I had. Now I will show you something. Yes, old man, poor old Sinclair was right, after all; and I have, I am positive, found the place. When I was coming up the river and heard about the second head found here in Calcutta—then, somehow, I remembered Sinclair. And the facts have proved that intuition correct! Come along."

They left the room, and proceeded down a dark underground passage where they needed flashlights.

"Be very quiet," whispered Bugs. "The enemy is very clever. So clever in fact that I feel myself on a quicksand. Tonight I imitate Sinclair, but with more caution. I have you back of me, ready to help if need be. And fifty Chinese and eleven of my own men—to whom I will introduce you—at your orders. Maybe I will not need your help. I may be able to enter that native house across the street and get out again, with information which may change my plan. That is to be seen.

"The house, as you will have noticed, is of stone. Very solid. Like a castle. Very respectable, apparently. Our police—trained that way—would apologize to the owner if, for example, some thief or other, trying to escape them, should seek refuge in the compound—you will have also noticed that the compound is quite large, with a fine high stone wall around it. Exclusive! Now, quietly . . ."

Their lights moved along the dark tunnel. Suddenly they flashed upon two Chinese.

"They are here on guard, as I said," whispered Bugs. "To prevent any one coming from the rooms too close to where we are going—lest there be a noise which will betray us."

"Who are you afraid will hear?" breathed Williams.

"I don't know. Perhaps nobody can hear through the wall. But I dare not take chances. Here we are!"

Their lights showed the end of the tunnel. But they no longer lighted walls of earth, for the end of the tunnel was of brick. Bricks that had been there a long time. Bricks from which the earth on the Chinese side had been removed—with the care and thoroughness of Chinese and carried out of the tunnel altogether. For there were no heaps of earth in the passage to indicate the tremendous amount of work the digging coolies had performed, extending their underground place toward the house across the street until stopped by the brick wall.

BUGS led Williams some yards back up the passage and whispered: "Those bricks you saw there are, I believe, the bricks of the underground Calcutta Sinclair used to talk about. The place was dug out years ago— Lord knows how many—and then lined with brick. Of course, the bricks were laid right against the earth walls. My Chinese worked until they were stopped by the bricks on this side of underground Calcutta. Knock down those bricks and you will find yourself in the den of the Tiger Hashishin Sinclair talked about years ago. Unless I am altogether mistaken, and I am certain I'm not. The place where Sinclair went that night to his death. . ."

"Where do I come in?" asked Williams.

"You will be here to knock down those bricks, with sixty men to help you. To break your way into underground Calcutta—if I don't come back to you within forty minutes."

"What?" Williams was both surprised and startled.

"I have figured it out as the best way," said Bugs. "I am going to enter that house across the street tonight—as Sinclair did years ago. But while I go alone you will be here to help—to batter down that wall if I do not come back at the time agreed upon."

"But why?" gasped Williams. "Why take that chance? Why not just break down the brick wall—all of us together. Why should you go alone into a place where you know they killed poor old Sinclair?"

"Suppose I am wrong?" asked Bugs. "What then—if we break down the wall? But that's not the big reason—because I feel too sure I am right. The point is that if we broke in not only would the majority of the gang escape, but, what is more important, I would not get the evidence—the facts and history about the gang. I know what I am doing, and what to expect. But I rely on you. Now, no more objections. Here is the plan of campaign.

"I will walk into that house casually, boldly enough but cringing like the pedler I am supposed to be. When accosted I will try to sell goods. I will ask for food, a place to lie down and rest. For I will be a very poor and very tired box-walla.

"What follows then is destined to follow. A man is a fool who is not a fatalist —within limits. But I won't trust to Fate longer than forty minutes. You come in then. Don't wait a second longer. Break down the wall and come to my help with your men—ready for a hell of a scrap. The Hashishin will not have guns, you know—their ancient method is the knife or poison. My ten men would be helpless with any sort of firearm, and the Chinese will use hatchets. You and I will have guns—you will bring one for me, since poor box-wallas do not carry revolvers.

"But do not let me alarm you. It is getting late. Now we will muster up your men and have them here and ready. Then I will start for the house across the street.

V

THE NIGHT was hot and muggy. Bugs, with the timidity of a pedler, pushed open the gate of the compound of the house across the street. A few stunted trees in the compound rustled uncannily—but it was only the night birds and creeping things of India in the branches. Not a single light showed. Bugs was hard put to it to keep on the path to the house without striking his bare feet against the rock border. He knocked gently on the door of the house, like a man afraid. There was no answer to his knock. He knocked again, more loudly. Behind the door a man grunted as if annoyed at being disturbed.

"Who is there?" he growled.

"A poor pedler who seeks to sell some of his poor stock to the lord of this house, or to the servants of that lord," whined Bugs.

"I do not open the door to pedlers—go elsewhere," sneered the man behind the door.

"I am very poor and need food," whined Bugs. "For a meal I will give of

my goods. For a meal and a place to rest I would, I think, give my life, so hungry and weary am I!"

"Well," growled the voice, "I will open the door. But you have not deceived me—your tale of poverty is too old. All pedlers have been telling the same lie since the beginning of the world. Trash in the pedler's pack and in the pedler a pack of lies—the old proverb tells us. So, I am not fooled. I will let you in and give you a meal, and allow you to rest here while you eat it, but—you will pay me well with your goods, O pedler!"

"Have it as you will," whined Bugs. "But I am very poor."

The man drew the heavy bars of the door and the door opened. There was no light in the hall.

"Come in, but step softly lest you waken the lord of the house," said the doorman.

Bugs went in—he never did a braver thing in his life.

He became aware that the doorman was very fat.

"This way, pedler. The lord of the house is economical. He is not as rich as he once was, so he permits few lights which burn money. Come this way—I have a small lamp in my room where I can examine your goods—and feed you."

Bugs followed the man along a passage. The air was heavy with the odor of age—a house in which many had lived and died. The fat man panted as he led the way.

Suddenly four men sprang out of the dark and seized Bugs. Big, powerful men. And a voice spoke sarcastically, in English:

"Good evening, Mr. Sinnat. I have waited some time for this visit."

"I am a poor pedler—" Bugs began whining in Hindustani.

"Tut, tut!" responded the voice. "Forget the character acting, Sinnat! This is your last appearance on any stage, so be yourself. I am going to let you live for half an hour, because I anticipate much enjoyment talking to you. So nice of you to come. I was waiting for you. So clever that wax head! So clever to follow the man who slunk away. He was as good an actor as you are. I sent him to the Maidan with instructions which he followed to the letter. But let us defer our little chat until we get downstairs, where, incidentally, I have something interesting to show you. *Chalow!*" he added to the four men.

The men picked Bugs up and carried him along another passage. Then down some steps, and then down an incline. Down, down, still in darkness. Bugs relaxed, wasting no energy on futile struggle. So he was carried down into underground Calcutta, as the dead Sinclair had named the place; the man who had spoken English following silently behind.

Down, until they reached a place where a brass lamp threw fretted light through ruby glass on the earth floor. A vast place, it seemed, dwindling into shadows. The four men turned and carried Bugs into a luxuriously furnished room, where they seated him in a comfortable chair. "I will allow you to be comfortable until the time arrives for your—er—somewhat uncomfortable finish!" drawled the sarcastic voice. "*Ek cheroot, sahib codo,*" he added to one of the men.

The man took a good cigar from a box and handed it to Bugs. The others examined his scant clothing for a weapon, but there was none.

"Allow me to give you a light!"

The person with the sarcastic voice struck a match and applied it to the cigar. Bugs puffed, studying the man. At last he saw the dreadful Tiger Hashishin. An old man with a face so evil that it was a horror. A long, thin face of wrinkles and hate. A native of a certain Mohammedan sect, the face of a bloodthirsty, cruel murderer.

The Tiger Hashishin sat down at a desk close to Bugs. He told two of his men to stand by Bugs' chair and sent the other two away.

"Although you are not armed, my dear Sinnat—a revolver under a pedler's arm would be out of character, would it not?—I am taking no chances of being injured by your well known strength when, as you

will, you become—er—excited at some of the things I am going to tell you. So I am keeping two strong men here. Otherwise you are free to make yourself as comfortable as you are able to in that arm-chair.

THE TIGER grinned, showing yellow fangs of teeth. The grin was the maniacal boastful grin of the criminal who is about to boast of his crimes.

"Have you nothing to say? Do you still persist in pretending to be a box-walla?"

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your choice of tobacco," drawled Bugs.

"Ah, you take it well. You would, of course. But this may dampen your courage," responded the Tiger.

He took from his desk a gold coin of about the size of a five dollar piece—an English sovereign—and handed it to Bugs.

"Examine that—in the manner known to you!"

Bugs took the coin and held it so the light slanted on it in a certain way. Engraved on the disk, but visible only to one knowing how to look for it, was, 002.

"What do you make of that?" asked the Tiger eagerly.

"This is the identification and number of a very gallant gentleman," said Bugs quietly. "His name was Sinclair, and you killed him foully!"

"Yes! Yes!" gloated the Tiger. "And I tortured him until he told me how to find the number."

"You lie," drawled Bugs. "No torture could make him reveal that."

The Tiger's mouth twisted, and a fleck of froth showed on his lips. With an effort he got control of himself.

"Oh, well, one must permit a man about to die unpleasantly to have his little say," rasped the Tiger.

Bugs waited, but the Tiger did not pursue the subject. Ability to find the number meant little. Bugs had called the Tiger a liar in order to find out if the Tiger would attempt to prove himself otherwise—by explaining the code to which the number was the key: every secret service man having his own code of communication, to which his number was the key.

Sinclair, under torture, might have shown him how to find the number, if he had not discovered it himself during the elapsed years; but Sinclair under torture, even unstrung with opium, had not revealed the important meaning of that number.

"You killed him?" said Bugs.

"No, he killed himself," answered the Tiger.

Bugs, with difficulty, repressed a shiver. What horrible torture had been administered to Sinclair—so terrible that Sinclair had killed himself to escape it?

"You see," sneered the Tiger, "I did not have to do anything—except bind and gag him, and let him roll about on the floor out there, while we all enjoyed ourselves watching him. White men should avoid opium. It—er—affects their nerves. The agonizing need of it killed Sinclair. I kept promising him opium, of course. That was the fun of it. Finally he showed me how to find the number on the coin. He was crying, begging and pleading for opium. I could not—no man could invent a torture nearly so terrible as the torture of the need of opium in a white man. So, really, he killed himself with his own need!"

"But I don't take opium," said Bugs.

He was figuring on the time. Forty minutes is not long, but it was too long if the Tiger was going to begin torture immediately. Besides, Bugs had to handle the forty minutes, and the Tiger, so that the Tiger would boast and tell him all about his crimes, and about his organization. That Sinclair had died in the underground place was not enough to convict the gang. Many men have died from need of opium—with their best friends allowing them to die in ignorant hope of curing them.

"No," said the Tiger, "you do not use opium. Quicklime is your finish! I have a bath of quicklime ready for you. You will be put into it and kept there—with your head out so that you can tell me what it feels like!"

With an effort Bugs managed to put admiration into his voice.

"You must have killed, or had killed, a lot of people," he said.

The face of the Tiger flushed with pleasure. Bugs relaxed. For he knew that the Tiger would braggingly tell him what he wanted to know. He looked at Bugs through half shut eyes.

"Not that it matters now that I have you, Sinnat," he began, "but I have never been able to decide just how clever you are. That you are the only Englishman with enough intelligence to worry me—or, rather, irritate me—I have admitted for years. That was why I set my elaborate trap for you.

"Sinclair nearly became dangerous. Like you, he deduced my existence and the existence of my organization and this place; and, like you, and like all you bull headed English, he thought he could come here and either bluff me or capture me, or else—as I think you did—get enough evidence for a concerted police raid. Yes, that was why you came here. Very silly. Brave, perhaps, but inane. For years it has seemed to me judicious to get rid of you, but you were not easy to get at. Finally I got the idea of four spectacular murders. To murder four white men at the same time, but in different places, was simple enough, of course—white men wandering around at night are easily taken by a native who goes begging for alms.

"I HAD three men detailed for each killing. But simple killing was not enough—not a sufficiently attractive bait. So I ordered the beheadings and the heads prominently displayed on posts. That, I knew, would result in your being sent on the case. I knew you would have no sort of clue, so I put myself in your place. In your place I would have deduced that an organization had done the killings—any child could see that. The second murder in Calcutta would point to the gang's headquarters being there, so you would operate from Calcutta. Then you would remember the disappearance of Sinclair, which would suggest something in the way of an organization quite out of the ordinary—as the heads did. In your place I would have had a wax image of myself put in a post, as you did. Your image would cause all the excitement in the world, while an ordinary wax head would be merely a puzzle.

"Then, in your place, I would follow the man or men reacting differently to the wax head from the gaping crowd. So I deduced as you would, and did, deduce. Then all I had to do was wait for you to come here and pay me this visit."

"Very clever." Bugs puffed deeply on the cigar.

"Thank you. And you know who we are? Sinclair had figured that out—were you as clever?"

"Not as clever as Sinclair," replied Bugs. "But of course I know you are the last of the Hashishin. The last ruler of the old order of secret murderers, who scorned honor and decency. I heard once that small bands of Hashishin still linger in Syria, but that is doubtful."

The Tiger grinned proudly.

"You are so clever, Sinnat, that I almost dislike killing you! I could use a man like you. A pity you have such foolish notions concerning what you call honor. You might even succeed me as ruler—for I am much older than you. Yes, you are correct. I am the last ruler of the Hashishin. A long time since Hassan Sabbah founded our order—since we became a branch of the Shiite sect of Isma'ilites—a branch eventually disowned and hated and hunted by all Shiites, by all Mohammedans.

"The rest of Islam thought it had killed us all, got rid of us—except for the Syrian rumor—but it was wrong. A company of us reached Calcutta. But that was long after we had dealings with the Crusaders. A long time. The Hashishin was founded by Hassan Sabbah in the year William conquered your little island, and made a nation out of it—1066. And we are the last. A small but determined band of one hundred and sixteen, devoted to the

secret slaying of our enemies—which means every one in the world but ourselves. Fools! Fools were the other sects of Mohammedism. Had they not waged war on us Mohammed would rule the world. Never mind. We have faithfully kept to the tenets of assassination of our order. But never yet—not even when we killed Nizam-ul-Mulk, Hassan's old friend in the long ago—never yet did a ruler of Hashishin have so much cause for congratulation as I have! For I have you! And I have you by outwitting you, Sinnat!"

In the Tiger's desk would be the records of the Hashishin. Bugs had all the evidence he needed. But he was troubled. Where was the American? Why did not Williams break down that wall? The forty minutes had surely passed . . .

"I am inclined to increase the horror of your death, if I could, because you have so often defiled Mohammed by pretending to be a Mohammedan," said the Tiger.

He nodded to the two men by Bugs' chair.

"The sahib is waiting for his warm bath," said the Tiger.

"Just a moment," interposed Bugs.

The situation was desperate. It began to look as if the brick wall by which Williams had been posted had not been the right one. Those twisting and turning tunnels! Perhaps the brick wall was far away from this room—perhaps it was not the wall of underground Calcutta at all! The men carrying Bugs had circled deviously. And perhaps the wall was too thick. Perhaps many feet of solid earth lay between the bricks and underground Calcutta. Whatever had happened, it looked like the end of Bugs. And a very terrible end.

"Ah!" The Tiger sneered. "Like a poor thing about to be hanged you cry for time. For just another moment of life! Life that must end, anyway. I really expected better of you, Sinnat."

Bugs laughed.

"You misunderstood me. The end is obvious, and it's no use fretting about it. What I wanted to say was something that would disillusion you."

"Disillusion me! About what?" growled the Tiger.

"About your imagined cleverness," drawled Bugs.

The Tiger seemed about to strike him. But he restrained himself.

"Explain," he said.

"I thought I would tell you," drawled Bugs, "that it was I who set the bait for the eager fish—not you!"

"What?"

"Yes, I deduced as you did; but I went farther. A little while ago you admitted not being quite sure how clever I am—my little boast now! I stuck up the wax head to trap you, knowing you would send a man to slink away. How otherwise could I have led you to think you were trapping me? How otherwise could I have tricked you into admitting all the damnable things you have admitted—evidence against yourself?"

The Tiger screamed with anger.

"A lot of good this evidence will do you! Your bath waits! Put him into it, men, and let him brag about his cleverness, if he can, when the lime is eating the flesh from his writhing bones!"

Crash!

The crash of a heavy battering ram. The brick wall collapsed, and the American at the head of his fighting men broke through the opening.

BUGS was on his feet. His knee took one of the men in the groin. As that one collapsed Bugs knocked the other down with his fist. He saw the Tiger reach for a revolver and point it . . .

A powerful body hurtled through the air in a magnificent flying tackle, and the Tiger collapsed, stunned, as Williams hit him with crushing force. The gun exploded harmlessly. With wonderful rapidity the American snapped handcuffs on the Tiger, thrust his revolver into Bugs' hand and drew his own. A howling, hacking mêlée echoed under the ancient arches of underground Calcutta. The

Chinese yelled their way into action; Bugs' men squealed like Ghurkas; but the Hashishin poured from hidden places in a silent, vengeful flood.

All this in that sudden moment following the crash of the bricks and the flying tackle of Williams . . . The two men Bugs had downed clutched and bit at his knees. He turned and smashed the butt of the gun upon their heads. Williams was yelling, 'You wanted that bird alive, so I ironed him!'

Then the lights of underground Calcutta, those old brass lamps, went out in a crash not heard above the fight, as the Hashishin cut them down . . .

The dreadful darkness of a tomb weighing on the spirits of the Chinese and Bugs' men, made worse by their being in a strange place full of nooks and hiding places from where their enemies could come at them . . .

"The flashlights!" screamed Bugs.

Men do not make flying tackles with flashlights in their hands, and the American had dropped them somewhere near the fallen bricks of the wall. He had gone for them before Bugs had screamed, and now he groped and cursed amid dust of ancient masonry. Bugs yelled again. He was heard because his own people had been awed into a silence by the dark and the danger—in which they could only seek to protect themselves against odds.

"Lie flat on the floor and cut at anything on its feet!" he yelled in Chinese and Burmese, which the Hashishin would not be likely to understand.

He was obeyed, and that uncanny battle went on. The Hashishin had been bred for centuries as silent killers, and they expected to hang if captured. Desperate men and, what made it worse, their women began creeping out from the remote end of the place—either to help or to cut up the wounded of the other side.

The clash of knives, the high pitched shriek of a wounded Chinese, the jungle laugh of Bugs' men, and the grunts of the Hashishin . . . And neither Bugs nor Williams could shoot. Neither could see a foot in front of his face. And the American was rooting among the bricks, cursing, damning the flashlights.

"Damn the blasted things! If I get them we— Ah! Got it!"

The sudden glare disconcerted both the men and women of the Hashishin. The glow of a second light confused them. And the roar of the revolvers in the echoing place sent them hurrying for cover. Bugs and Williams were both good shots, and it is easy to aim at a target on which you are holding a flashlight. As the Hashishin broke for cover, Bugs yelled to the snake man:

"Take your men up through the Chinese place, and surround the house; kill or hold any who try to escape! Come on, Yank, we've got these brutes."

Williams turned his light on the Tiger. The old murderer met the glare with eyes that were like a snake's. He twisted and writhed against the steel on his wrist.

"No danger of his having a bomb or something, is there?" asked the American.

"Not a chance in the world," answered Bugs. "Come on, let's round up the assassins. Soon as we make sure they have no way of escape we will let the police take charge. We can phone from the Chinese store. God, fancy phoning for police to come with the wagon for the Hashishin that troubled Richard the Lion Heart and the Crusaders!"

He shouted to the Hashishin as he and Williams advanced cautiously at the head of their men, their flashlights showing what manner of strange place it was.

"Your leader will hang, but you who surrender will not hang. Prison on the islands for life!"

That was the Indian Penal Code, and the now thoroughly crushed Hashishin began coming out of their hiding places. It was interesting to notice that each brought his woman with him—pushing her somewhat in front.

"You knew darned well that old Tiger was on to you," said Williams as they watched the police lining up the Hashishin. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you would never have waited the forty minutes if I had!" said Bugs.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A NOTE from S. B. H. Hurst in connection with his story, "The Tiger Hashishin" in this issue:

Winslow, Wash.

The trouble I find in the "Bugs" tales is to make them fit conservative fiction, the general facts on which they are based being so unusual. I was but sixteen when I went to India. At seventeen I was sent down to the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. The islands are the penal colony for all native India—no whites. There were fourteen thousand murderers there from north in Afghanistan to south, Cape Comorin. I studied India there, in a cross-section of peoples, languages, religions and habits.

Twenty-five years of travel and study on the Peninsular could not have given me what I got at the islands—not to mention Burma, to which I was transferred eighteen months later. Among those fourteen thousand murderers, from their records, and from talking with them, I learned about fantastic murders which make the four heads in my story seem commonplace.

THE utterly wild, mad forms of murder, and the extraordinary reasons for the crimes. And during my service in Burma—the height of the dacoit period—I saw things you would not believe humanly possible. And places.

Recently I was laughed at by some fellow who wrote to a magazine which published a "Bugs"

story in which there were half a million images of Buddha in one temple. I suggested the encyclopedia, since my memory might have slipped. The actual number is four hundred and eighty thousand, eight hundred and six. The Hashishin are of course historical, and scattered bands still exist. Our word assassin comes from this Arabic designation of the eaters of Cannabis indica. Scott in "The Talisman" tells how they bothered Richard of England.

—S. B. H. HURST

ON A table here in the office reposes a peculiar inkwell. The base is fashioned out of the polished oak of an ammunition case. The pen-rest consists of the shoe of an Arab horse, ornamented with cartridge shells hammered and cut into decorative patterns. From the pen-rest hangs a Croix de Guerre with three silvered stars. And in a drawer in the base is the actual citation of the man who earned the cross, who incidentally is a friend of Georges Surdez, the donor of this interesting trophy. Mr. Surdez recently returned from a long stay in Morocco. In view of his opportunities of studying the Foreign Legion at first hand, the following communication to Camp-Fire is very welcome:

New York, N. Y.

Since returning to the States, I have been asked fifty times: "That Legion spirit is the bunk, isn't it? Largely exaggerated?"

I have been fortunate enough to be very close to the Legion for more than a year. I have met hundreds of Legionnaires, from Colonel Rollet, the most famous officer actually with the Corps, to inmates of the Disciplinary Company's Repression Section. I have visited every regimental headquarters, the Marseilles depot; I have seen and been with the Legion in the hills and in the plains, in Sahara and Morocco. I have hundreds of acquaintances, at least a hundred friends, perhaps a half score intimate friends of various ranks. In certain places, I was scarcely considered an outsider. I have heard the inside gossip, been told the thousand small miseries of the life and been shown the seamy side of glory. I have seen the sick and the wounded.

NO, THERE has been no exaggeration. Legionnaires are men with men's strength and men's weaknesses. Jealousy, pettiness, greed, all exist among them. They are men who suffered before enlisting, who have suffered since, morally and physically. They are hard boiled and skeptical. Few believe in Santa Claus. But one thing has remained untouched, their belief in the Legion. Deserters hiding in brothels have risked discovery to answer the call: "À moi, la Legion!" Captains, majors, have answered it when uttered by privates, while there is the story of a major who once found need of it in a private brawl. The street was filled with Legionnaires within a minute, and civilian interference melted before their pressure.

One can not explain that spirit any more than one can explain life itself. It is contagious, very contagious.

NOW, the Legion has emerged from the growing pains that followed the Great War. It has increased considerably in numbers, at the very least to twice the figures of 1913. Those officers who came from other units to handle this larger mass have become either true Legionnaires or have been weeded out. The old type of Legion non-commissioned officer is reappearing.

The confusion of the early 1920's is a thing of the past, the Corps has been refined to its former flawless metal in the crucible of the hard Mid-Atlas columns, of The Riff, of Syria. The Russian influx of 1922 which temporarily changed the composition of the regiments, without detriment to their fighting worth, has been absorbed, the proportions of nationalities are very nearly those of the pre-War Legion.

—GEORGES SURDEZ

THE exception taken in the following letter seems to be entirely valid. Captain F. W. Hopkins of "Ask Adventure," basing his reply on published reports from Washington that some 600 Marines and about 40 officers had been withdrawn from the MCEF in China, and that the remainder would be withdrawn immediately, told a reader that there were no Marines in China. The report was premature.

Shanghai, China

I wish to invite to your attention an article in *Adventure*, of the issue of February 15th, 1930, and the answers thereto, signed by Captain F. W. Hopkins.

Question No. 2: "How long does a Marine stay in China?" This question is answered by Captain Hopkins thus: "There are practically no Marines ashore in China now except the permanent guard at the Legation." This statement is evidently in error.

Please note the heading of this letter. I am not revealing any military secret when I inform you that the strength of the 4th Marines is 53 officers and 1166 enlisted men, all of whom are ashore in Shanghai, and the Headquarters of the Regiment is located at 118 Sinza Road, Shanghai.

The 4th Marines Rugby Football Team has just completed a highly successful season, 1929–1930,

winning the Rugby Football Championship of the Orient, by defeating the best British Service and Civilian Rugby teams that could be brought to Shanghai to play them. Ten victories and one defeat is the record that won the championship.

At the game between the 4th Marines and the Welch Regiment from Singapore, played in Shanghai, February 23, the entire 4th Regiment of Marines, from Colonel down to cooks and messmen, turned out to see this game, which the Marines won, 15 to 6. Yes, all hands were there, and how!

Incidentally the Welch Regiment is known as the best regiment for rugger in the British Army, and their Rugby team has not been defeated for three years, prior to meeting the 4th Marines. This same Welch Regiment taught the Marines the game of Rugby in Tientsin, China, in 1927.

If Captain Hopkins had seen the Welch 4th Marines Rugby Football game, he would surely have been reminded that there *were* indeed Marines ashore in China—in Shanghai at least—and judging from the way they rooted for their team they were not only present in numbers, but in goodly spirit, also.

These Rugby Football games in Shanghai take on an "International" aspect, and are quite colorful and keenly interesting. Bands enliven the crowd, and the "rooting" is just about all that one could ask for. Seventy minutes of play is brimful of thrills and excitement, for spectators and players alike.

I will thank you for the publication of this letter in an early edition of your splendid magazine.

—CHARLES D. BAYLIS,
First Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps, 4th Marines

MR. BABYLON has struck up some fine acquaintances through the magazine. He'd like more.

860 N. Canal St., N. S.
Pittsburgh, Pa.

I read with much interest Sandy Ramsay's letter in the last issue and being a good friend of his I would advise all you readers not to take him too seriously. You see, he is not quite over the war yet. Those Scotch are too tight to give up. (Take note, Sandy.) His version of the Yanks is all wrong, and I don't think he would have written about that affair at Reims if he thought any of the boys' mothers would read it. We must forget the past and hateful things and look forward to the friendship of all nations. Sandy's letter is a step backward and we in the spirit of Camp-Fire will let it pass.

One thing I want to ask Sandy is did he stand in the trench waiting to go over for the first time with the spirit of a schoolboy out for a lark or was he on the verge of a panic? Come, let's forget the war and join with me in hearing of some of the boys I have heard from. I have made pen friends from all over the globe through *Adventure* and we have carried on in the spirit of good fellowship and want to hear from all of you. Just drop me a line and join the circle.

THE first letter I received was from Sandy Ramsay in Scotland and he is somewhat of a poet and an interesting writer. Another from Wendover stuck away down in Zamboanga, P. I., and he runs a rubber and saw mill. A friend of Georges Surdez from the legion, an 18 year old kid, a great fellow who has all ready won the Croix de Guerre and other medals, writes great letters chuck full of yarns. Georges also drops in now and then when he is not chasing Riffs.

A jump over to Australia, where five of the boys with interesting histories all come in with hot letters. Among them is a former air service man, Pete Stokes, great chap. And land sakes, even Talman, a missonary from down China way, has time to drop in on us. A water and ice float dodger who lives in a houseboat down on the Ohio River named Brant had some narrow escapes and topped them off by getting married (poor fellow).

There is Larson from Peru, Cameron from Arabia, Tanner & Wood from Egypt, Macey from India, Haas from Singapore and Manicom from the No Man's land, Chicago, with a history like a book. Not forgetting Stephenson in Honolulu and Palmer in Phila., Pa. Many others that would make Camp-Fire tingle with their tales if they cared to write them.

—FRANK G. BABYLON

OUR old friend Tonto writes in to give a few pointers on Western customs to erring authors.

This complaint I am voicing should be called "tips for writers". It is true that one can not write with a hazy romance about something he knows too well, so we can not expect authors to understand the finer points of a cowman's trade, but we can expect some motive or object in all the spectacular riding and shooting and a reasonable attention to primer habits and customs.

One thing I would impress upon authors is that cowboys don't ride mares, or stallions, as both would be bedlam in a range outfit. Another is about shooting hats off. Put one on a dummy and try it. Also before the description of the various kinds of cattle stealing, etc., the A B C of branding be studied, and that it takes a long time for a brand to peel, not alone to heal.

None of these heroes ever ride bog, ride for worms, or fix fence, or shoe horses, or any of the daily things which take most of a cow outfit's time, but they are constantly driving at a run a lot of mixed stuff, somewhere, or escaping. Shades of the old trail drivers, or Texas beef masters, must quiver as they see cattle being fattened, trotted and jammed around. Cows are run for a purpose, which is to grow calves and yearlings for sale, or grow steers for beef.

RANGE wars were always from some economic need, of one side or the other. None but a few cheap gamblers and tin horns ever fought in cold

blood, except to defend themselves, or because they were afraid of the other man, and tried to beat him to it. The gun artists were either hired, or hunting a rep by killing some one with one already, and therefore making more money when hired, or making their gambling good, if it was bad. Plain outlaws and train robbers were very simple folk. There is more stealing in cows now than ever and it's hard to track meat trucks on highways.

Folks were no more heroic in olden days than now. Kit Carson was a quiet spoken and plain spoken man, and he didn't use that funny language we see so often. The old chief of the Apaches is just as much of a good solid man, and if you understand him, a very reliable person, and the Apaches as a rule are mighty fine, hard working people, and very intelligent, and so are the Navajos and other Indians. Some of them have been treated badly, and some were bad, but in the bulk the older Indian is more honest and every bit as good a man in his way as the average white man.

THERE was nothing done in the past days that isn't better done now, from roping a calf to riding a horse.

There is nothing an Indian can do a white man can not do better if he tries, from trailing to shooting, or skulking in ambush.

There is a cultured doctor who is a better bow shot than Robin Hood, for he can outdo the records of hundreds of years of English bowmen, and he could kill a dozen of the best Comanches or Kiowas, or other arrow artists, before they could even reach into the range of his bow.

I see tyros, at rodeos, riding horses bareback, which was quite a trick of Jim Allen of the trail days of the Hashknives, and riding has become an art boys can learn who never punched a cow—in a year or two, around a movie lot.

The fancy shooting, rolling, fanning, thumbing, etc., was all acrobatics. The draw was from practise, one getting it in ten thousand who were trying. The few old gun artists left have taken to the automatic. Why, some of these authors even think an automatic keeps shooting if one presses a trigger down, and they don't know some use a grass rope, others a rawhide, some tie, some dally, etc. A cow horse is rarely a race horse. A circle horse may be fast on a long run, and a cutting pony fast on short quick turns, but they all get tired, they all must be fed, and nothing can stand day after day of work given in these Westerns, where the cowboy rides his one pet pony forever.

I am closing, because here, idle, waiting for rain, I see a big smoke, and I'm sure it's quite a fire, perhaps up on the north ranch, and burning feed we will sure need if it don't rain soon. —TONTO

QUOTING a bit from a letter I received the other day from W. C. Tuttle:

Hollywood, California

Had my usual good time down on the Arizona cattle ranges, where the real old time stuff still remains. For those who are satisfied that there are no cattle ranges and cowboys left, I'd advise a dose of Cochise County, Arizona. Better still, a run down to Cananea, Sonora, Mexico, where the Green Cattle company own two and a half million acres, run more than a hundred thousand head of cattle, and employ a regular crew of three hundred punchers. —TUT.

A FURTHER letter in the correspondence between Gordon MacCreagh and Russel L. Fox on the subject of sportsmanship in big game hunting.

Pattison, Miss.

Dear Mr. MacCreagh: As you say in your letter, there is too much of this unsportsman-like propaganda foisted on the minds of the public. Most of it done by a group of millionaire sports, lusting after trophies and caring little how they get them as long as they have them to crow over and boast about to their foolish and admiring friends. Big game hunting under such conditions degenerates from a field of true sport to wanton brutal murder.

Yes, there are laws both in Kenya and Tanganyika now which forbid the hunting of any game between the hours of sundown and sunrise. These laws were passed with the intention of preventing the unsportsman-like practise of hunting game from tree bomas. I can not say that I approve of the law as a whole, but I suppose that it is the only effective method of combating the pernicious habit of hunting from trees. The other method (that of hunting from the ground) I consider quite sportsman-like, for in most cases the boma is low enough to permit one to see over the top of its front wall from a sitting position, there being no top on the boma.

The primary object of such a structure is that of a blind, and the only protection afforded is psychological. A friend of mine, Mr. Chas. Cottar, of Nairobi, has shot lion without any other light than that of the stars or the moon, without other concealment or protection than that of a blanket thrown over the steamer chair in which he was sitting. But I suppose that he takes chances which many men would avoid, and too he has been mauled badly on several occasions as a result of his indiscretions.

HOW bitterly true are your conclusions as to the practise of shooting game from motor cars. The tragic part of it is that this is followed mostly by our own American citizens, that is, among the scions of wealth of whom you spoke.

They have a rather efficient system of keeping tab on hunters out on the East coast now. Simple and very, oh very expeditious. The game department offers a very liberal reward to the native or

natives who secure the conviction of a game law violator. The hell of it is that the natives, being without morals and withal quite greedy, oftentimes swear to a deliberate lie in the hopes of profiting from a conviction. It is needless to say that a white man's word (particularly that of a defendant) is often discredited by the testimony of his shenzie accuser. One would naturally and quite correctly infer that under such conditions the game department does not have the hearty cooperation of the settlers.

RATHER an amusing incident happened recently, while I was out in Kenya. A game warden passing near a poor settler's farm stopped for a drink and a bit of a chat. While there, he noticed a fresh eland-hide rug on the floor. The family being naturally courteous and not wishing to offend the warden's feelings tried in a tactful manner to get rid of him. But being possessed of a very thick skin, and seemingly unaware of their delicate hints, he lingered on. At last in desperation the family were forced to serve lunch (already delayed an hour) and to invite the warden.

At first they served no meat but were at length forced to, due to the warden's comments on the delightful aroma emanating from cooking meat. They served the meat (eland steak). The warden finished his meal. Then asked the host for his license. The poor devil had none—not even a 10 shilling license for hunting on his own land. I sincerely doubt if he had the price. The warden confiscated the rest of the eland flesh, took the unfortunate fellow into custody, and naively admitted that he had practically forced the family to invite him to lunch so that he might obtain enough evidence for a conviction, as the hide alone was not enough evidence to warrant an arrest. You can imagine how tickled the other settlers were to hear about the warden's little joke.

The game department is simply rotten with graft (if I am informed correctly), concessions to hunt in Tanganyika, professional guides licenses to hunt there; these being issued at the discretion of the head game warden, who may grant these privileges to whom he pleases, but may not be compelled to issue them to any one. —RUSSELL L. FOX

ONE'S own job often seems more prosaic than the other fellow's. And perhaps it is. But there would be very little fiction if some of us hadn't the peculiar faculty of reading drama into the apparent commonplace. The color of far places holds faint glamour for the natives, but it tinges the dreams of adventurers and stay-at-homes in other lands.

Georges Surdez, who has a message for us in another column of the Camp-Fire, recently told me that the Berbers fight not for any particular cause, but because they like fighting. When there happens to be no foreign enemy, they seem to get quite as much satisfaction in inter-tribal warfare. In other words, fighting is their business, their life. They have no other. But I doubt strongly that the Berber warriors see any particular drama in their life of concentrated action.

Miami, Florida

Heave a sigh of resignation and then cast your eye down one of those lovely missives editors like to receive. It's a protest, no less and no more. About the yarn in the April 1st issue by Ralph R. Perry:

Did brother Perry, I wonder, ever fire in a stokehold? Frankly his yarn doesn't sound like it. He has put in a lot of facts, I suspect, to give a glamourous background of a hellish stokehold where thundering fires and dropping stokers send a delicious chill and shiver up the backs of prosaic readers. But now honestly, to any one who has done it, the thing falls flat. The reader gets the impression of an exhausted crew of stokers and a third engineer who have been battling the storm for thirty-five hours. Where were the other two watches and the first and second engineer during that time? One works four hours in a fireroom and then washes up and rests eight. And there need be no more terrific work than at any other time.

BOILERS are made to form steam. They do it when the wind blows just as easy as when it does not. Easier usually, for the draft is better. I have been out in some of the worst hurricanes that ever lashed the Caribbean, one in fact where ships were sinking all around and a big steamer went down with all hands, and there was no more fuss below than on a calm day. True, the engineer stood by the throttle, slacking steam as the screw came out of the water between waves, but he was saving steam, not using it. And a thirty-five hour watch. Gracious me! He is really brutal with the characters.

And the number of stokers! If an owner faced a payroll for a tramp steamer such as brother Perry has forced on the reader, he'd have heart trouble. Two firemen on the watch would be about right, three at the most. But why go on? It may make good reading, but it falls flat to one who has swung a slice bar and rake. Spoils the rest of the yarn. There is a very thin line between tragedy and humor. Too thin in this case, I'm afraid. And now, having done my good deed for the day, and spoiled nobody's soup I hope, here's hoping *Adventure* keeps on with the same high standards it has tried to hold to in the past. —M. E. THOBURN

Danbury, Conn.

In my story "The Main Chance" you overlooked a fact planted as a Stop, Look, and Listen warning

for professional readers: namely, that an engineer had been on duty for thirty-five hours continuously in the *fireroom*. That implies an emergency, no ordinary one, either.

Surely it wasn't necessary to explain to a professional that the engineer on the routine watch spends most of his time in the engineroom, coming into the fireroom only for inspection (as the chief engineer did later in the story) and that if he isn't at the throttle he ought to be asleep in his bunk. Hence *Varney* wasn't standing a routine watch. The next paragraph adds the fact that the ship was being forced back toward shoal water, which explains the nature of the emergency and implies that the *Kennebec* is a low powered ship, presumably having trouble with her engines.

If I were writing a story of an automobile, and wrote that "with the accelerator on the floor the car panted down the straightaway at twenty miles an hour" I think everybody would understand either that it was a bum car or that there was something radically wrong with it. With a seaman's technical knowledge, the situation of the *Kennebec* was almost parallel.

I REALIZE that the misunderstanding was unconscious on your part, and as a writer I am to blame that it was possible to misunderstand. In my defense I can say only that the facts were in the story. Of course when you didn't accept the initial situation, the yarn was spoiled for you, and the further you read with the impression that *Varney* was standing a routine watch on a full powered, well found ship the worse matters got.

For example, you ask where the first and second assistants were. In the engineroom, of course! Where else would they be? If I had had an engineer relieve his junior in the fireroom, and stand watch in the fireroom you'd be right in assuming I didn't know what I was talking about.

And where were the other two watches? Working in the fireroom. It was "all hands save ship." Since you know a ship the size of the *Kennebec* carries a fireroom crew of six, with possibly three oilers and a donkey engineer, when you find six men in a stokehold why assume they are all in one watch? Of course that is part of your original error, but *Adventure* takes care enough to be accurate to make it worth while for a reader to cast back and be sure he isn't mistaken himself when he finds a sentence that appears to be preposterous.

NOW, that brings us to the matter of thirty-hours on duty. Unless a man is steel and india rubber, that *is* brutal. What is your longest stretch? Mine is twenty-seven hours, on a ship so small I couldn't stand without holding on to something. It came at the end of about two days' bad weather. A couple of men gave out, and the regular watches went. The men that could work, did—and I'm here to state that twelve hours steady is a mighty long time, and that every four hours after that gets worse in geometrical ratio.

Four on and eight off? If that's your story you have put in your time on the bigger boats, and under uncommonly generous owners and able chiefs at that.

As to sending delicious chills and shivers up the backs of prosaic readers, while you're more than a little hard on the rank and file of the *Adventure* audience, it *is* my purpose always to make the ninety-five readers out of a hundred who have never seen a ship except in pictures *feel* what an emergency at sea is like. To be dog tired and to suspect it's no damned use anyway *is* a kind of torture. You write of breezing through a hurricane. That's true, nine times out of ten. But have you been on a ship that hasn't weathered a blow? In the Caribbean you simply had the luck.

FOR the ninety-five readers who do not know, the fewer technical details in a story the better. "The Main Chance" deals with the manner in which three men reacted to a sea emergency. The emergency itself is only the background that brings out their characters. But for the sake of the five readers who do know, and who are interested in the technical details, I always try to put enough key facts into the yarn so that they can construct the situation in all its detail for themselves.

I wish you would read "The Main Chance" again from the point of view I have outlined. I am always glad to have mistakes pointed out. Sure I make them, though I don't think I did here. But at least one of the readers who took me to a cleaning for calling a reach rod a riser has become about the best booster I've got, and has done me the kindness of supplementing my own sea experience with tales of what actually happened to him. One man can't go everywhere, do everything, and have everything happen to him, worse luck. —RALPH R. PERRY

A COMRADE recalls his jackeroo days.

Athabasca, Alberta, Canada

I was much interested in the article regarding jackeroos in a recent issue, for at one time I, myself, was of that species—thirty years ago. It was on my uncle's station in Western Queensland. The life was pleasant. I, being a relative, was allowed 10/— a month! Jackeroos, as you have stated, paid, and handsomely. Some became overseers, some managers, and others started on their own account—depending on their calibre or their capital.

We had our own bachelor quarters, with a married couple to look after us. Occasionally we were invited to the house for dinner, when we had to appear in the uniform of civilization. The life was a pleasant one, as I have said—race meets, gymkhanas, tennis, and so on. The station was a large one, and had at one time covered territory of more than twenty thousand square miles. (I believe that the theft of a large mob of cattle in Rolf Bolderwood's 'Robbery Under Arms', is the description of an incident that took place on this station.)

But those huge estates were being gradually thrown open to selection. A selection comprised 20,000 acres, and was taken up for sheep by a selector. I know that selections were taken up in the names of every member of my uncle's family—relatives included—and, of course, they got the pick. I believe that cattle are no longer run in that territory. Drought was a serious menace to cattle. Sheep can stand it better, as you must know. Only that this letter is growing too long, I could tell you tales of suffering.

THE jackeroo is also an outlet for the stockmen's humor. And to the Australian black boy, he is *the* gift. He looks upon the jackeroo as comic opera composed especially for his delight. And if the jackeroo resents this point of view, he is liable to be hunted off the stage, not with ripe fruit, but with a good hard rock or similar object.

My uncle's boy, every time he saw me, would double up and almost choke with excess of humor, and merely because that, at my first muster, when the horse under me turned at an acute angle from his course, I continued on the original line, or rather, on a parabolic curve, and any one who has followed a parabola knows that the earth stops it very abruptly.

That somber little patch of darkness, thereafter, would steal up behind me and bring his whip across my horse's quarters, a devastating crack. I stood it as long as I could, then I caught him by his woolly head—my toes ache even now when I think of what he suffered.

Well, a few days later it ended in my uncle warning the goblin that if any more rock was stopped by me, or indeed wasn't stopped, that he would have him up before him—my uncle was a J. P.—and would send him to prison for twenty years, without any tobacco! Thereafter the boy contented himself with pantomime. The Australian blackfellow's sense of humor is primitive. The only thing to do is to ignore it—if you can.

IN THE same issue of *Adventure*, May 1st, is another letter, by L. G. Blochman, in which the Calcutta *Englishman* is mentioned. Names! What memories they waken! My father used to contribute to its columns, chiefly scientific articles on snake poisons. Your Dr. Weir Mitchell and he corresponded freely on that subject. Through Dr. Weir Mitchell, father became an Honorary Fellow of the College of Surgeons (or Physicians) of Philadelphia. I think this the correct designation. That is a long time ago. —BERESFORD RICHARDS

AS THIS issue goes to press, the newspapers are carrying notices of the passing of Richard Clark, of Deadwood. Probably it is true that a man of action is only as great as the mass of legend he accumulates around himself. Measured by this criterion, I suppose there have been few more romantic figures in the Old West than he. Woven into the glamorous tapestry of his life, however, were the crude, hard contours of unquestionable facts; the colors alone perhaps were heightened by hearsay. That he happens to be the hero of some sixty bloodcurdling dime novels which most of us, in the less inhibited days of our adolescence, thrilled to read, is I feel all in his favor.

Strangely enough, Clark was not native to the Frontier scene, or to the United States, for that matter. He came here from England as a lad of sixteen. The rush for gold early carried him to the Black Hills, and it was mainly in their shadow that he earned for himself his amazing reputation. Indian fighter, rider of the Pony Express, unofficial (if I remember aright) deputy of the law in the palmiest days of that roaring town of Deadwood.

There is a too obvious bit of irony in the fact that this man whose guns were the terror of hardened outlaws should have been reduced in his late years to acting as guide to dude ranchers. Just as there is a touch of pathos in the fact that he, like other old-timers, continued to wear the long curls and habiliments of the trails right into the gasoline era.

Yet it is natural for old-timers to cling to—live in, rather—the past. And their past was so redolent of adventure! There must have been plenty in the glowing remembered days of his youth to have sustained the old warrior, Deadwood Dick. —A. A. P.

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Desolate Island

TINY Jan Mayen in the Greenland Sea was claimed by Norway in 1929.

Request:—"Will you please give me all of the information that you have on hand on Jan Mayen Island, off the east coast of Greenland. Please give me a brief history of the island, also the population of it? By what country is it owned? Has the country that owns it any soldiers or sailors on it? By whom is it settled? What are the exports and imports of the island? How many towns are on the island? What town is the capital? Do any ships come to the island?"—JEROME K. BURKE, Elkhart, Indiana.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The island of Jan Mayen lies almost equidistant from Iceland and Greenland—and is about 600-odd miles airline from the coast of Norway. It lies in latitude 71 north and 9 west longitude in the Greenland Sea and is about 50 miles long by half that wide. At its northeastern extremity, which is very rugged in topography, rises the mountain of Beeren whose peak is 8350 ft. above sea level. The island flattens out toward its opposite extremity.

It has always been a barren, uninhabited region, being ice bound for most of every year, since it lies some 300 miles inside the great pack ice field. To my knowledge and information it still remains so with the following exception:

In 1921 the island of Jan Mayen was occupied by the Norwegian Meteorological Institute, a government bureau which has made daily observations of the weather since September of that year. But, on May 4th, 1927, the Norwegian Minister of State, at a sessions of the Storting, had declared that Jan Mayen was considered by Norway as falling within the Norwegian sphere of interest, and that all foreign powers concerned had been notified to that effect. The island was officially annexed by Norway, on May 8, 1929.

Any further data may perhaps be obtained from the American Geographical Society, Broadway and 156th St. New York City. Mr. Paul Tuckerman, Secretary. They have the maps you may desire.

There are no towns on Jan Mayen, merely the buildings of the Norwegian Met. Institute and of course no imports except the necessary supplies for that very limited colony.

I enclose my leaflet on Greenland, which will give you a fair idea of conditions in the same latitude, also in re the native population.

Snake

ONE full meal per week is sufficient for the average snake, especially if it leads a sedentary life.

Request:—"I have had a mild interest in snakes for the past few years, having a few native species such as bull, black, king snakes, etc., and would appreciate some information unobtainable in the Public Library.

1. How may the male snake be told from the female without actual dissection?

2. When shedding their skins, how may they be made to eat? I have had two bull snakes starve themselves to death at this time.

3. Should a steady diet, such as mice, be maintained, or should variety be added, in the form of birds, etc?

4. I understand one full meal per week is sufficient. Is this correct?

5. How may a rattler or copperhead be rendered harmless, such as is done in snake shows and circuses? I am very anxious to learn this, also whether or not the fangs grow in again after being removed."

—ROBERT C. LONG, New York City.

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—1. It is not always easy to distinguish the sexes among snakes. After a little practise, however, one can tell a male by the

fact that the tail is slightly swollen just posterior to the vent. In the female, there is no such swelling, and the base of the tail is more or less noticeably smaller than the body at the point of union of the two. In the male, the tail is longer as a rule, so that sex should have more ventral plates than the other. These plates are easily counted when the tail is turned upside down.

2. A healthy snake need not eat while shedding its skin. This process should not require a long enough time to endanger the snake's life through starvation. Your bull snakes must have been in poor condition or they would not have been unable to shed their skins.

3. I am sure that a snake will thrive on any good food that it takes readily and I surely would go to no great trouble in an effort to give it variety.

4. One full meal per week is sufficient for the average snake, especially if it leads a sedentary life.

5. Having never had the full confidence of a professional snake charmer, I am unable to give you information on commercialized methods of rendering snakes harmless. The only showman that I ever tried to glean such information from refused to enlighten me in the least. Very frequently only harmless snakes, such as boas and pythons, are handled by snake charmers and it is a well known fact that half starved vipers or those for some years in captivity are reluctant to bite when handled gently. I have seen several exhibits of charming that involved little or no risk and could have been duplicated by any one with perfect safety. I would not dare say what percentage of sideshow snake outfits include dangerously active examples of poisonous species.

Rattlers, copperheads and moccasins constantly renew their fangs, a process that could be stopped only by the mutilation of the bone bearing them.

Bedroll

THE cowboy's knapsack is light and simple.

Request:—"I am writing for information about a cowboy's bedroll. Is it called a 'soogan'? If not, what is it called?

Of what is a bedroll made?

Can you give me any particulars about making one that could be used in this part of the country?"

—LEONARD PEAK, Charleston, Illinois.

Reply, by Mr. G. W. Whiteaker:—The word "soogan" must be some word coined for a certain locality. It is not used down here as far as I have been able to learn. It sounds like some Indian word of the far north region.

The old time bedrolls are not used as extensively as in the early cattle running days. The ranches are not as far from their supply stations in the past few years as they were during the days of wagons and teams. The trips to towns are made now with trucks in hours where formerly it required days. Many of the ranches are called stock farms now on account of so much farming carried along with the stock raising.

There is not much to a bedroll—a couple of blankets, a tarpaulin (a stout waterproof canvas), and a slicker rolled together and tied on the back of the saddle. The tarp is spread on the ground first to keep out the dampness, then one blanket next to the tarp, fold up the coat or leather jerkin for a pillow, and cover with the other blanket and slicker.

Toilet articles, extra tobacco, sewing kit, extra shirt, etc., are often placed in the bedroll if the rider is going to be gone to some isolated section for several days hunting strays; otherwise they seldom carry more than a slicker.

Crossbow

WITH barrels for shooting bullets, pouches for shooting stones, grooves for arrows or darts, the crossbow has been used at some time or other by almost every race of people in the world. When called upon to describe how to make a specimen of this versatile bow, our archery expert very kindly arranged for a personal interview with a reader. In this way some dozen puzzling scale drawings and a great deal of complicated exposition were simplified.

Some idea of the variety of crossbows may be gleaned from Mr. Powell's letter.

Request:—"I am interested in crossbows, not altogether as a mere target weapon, but for practical hunting. Could you tell me how to make one? I can find plenty of books on how to make bows in the local library, but none on how to construct a crossbow. Just what are the details of the trigger construction? Do they have sights similar to a rifle and is the arrow made and feathered just the same as for ordinary bows?"—W. E. STANLEY, Long Beach, California.

Reply, by Mr. Earl B. Powell:—To instruct you how to make a crossbow would take almost a small book. It would take an article of about ten thousand words to tell all about it, as well as about a dozen scale drawings; to do this properly, it must be done right.

I expect to start on a trip back East in about three weeks, but I can find time to give you full instructions, if you will make it a point to see me personally, which is easy on account of Long Beach being so near to Los Angeles. If you will call me at Angelus 6402, or let me know when to expect you, I could give you an hour or two, and explain in that time better than I could if I took a day off to write to you, and actually show you what I mean.

I am working on a series of articles which are to appear in a new magazine known as *Popular Homecraft,* which will include all about making archery tackle, and among them I will have one on the crossbow, but it is a good two days' work to get it ready so that it can be understood by the average beginner

(or any one else). I will also have one on the blowgun, and other items.

In regard to the sights of a crossbow, will say that they vary, but the favorite seems to have been a peep sight. Some were entirely without sights, and aimed by pointing after the manner of a shotgun, depending on guesswork for elevation, etc.

They were made with barrels for shooting bullets, with pouches for shooting stones, grooved trough for arrows, as well as with covered trough, and ranged from the giant Roman catapult shooting great beams and stones down to small ones that could be held in one hand like a pistol, and at some time or other were used by many races.

The Chinese had magazine crossbows, of which one is at the Museum at Exposition Park in Los Angeles. These had a box above the groove and on pulling back the string into the notch it tripped a catch, letting an arrow drop into the groove ready for shooting.

A certain tribe of negroes in Africa have a most ingenious bow for shooting birds and game. The arrow is made of a palm leaf rib and is about eight inches long, and is poisoned. They are said to be able to hit a small bird at twenty paces with it.

The bolt, or quarrel, as the arrow for the crossbow is called, is usually two-feathered; and they have been winged with thin plates of horn, brass, stiff leather, etc., as well as feathers.

Lost Vessels

OF THE three ships mentioned, only one is reported lost—the *Merida*, foundered in Lake Erie in 1916.

Request:—"Is there any place in America, open to the public, that one can go for information regarding sunken ships? I imagine there are records kept of them.

I would like information about the following ships: exact place where sunk, depth, owners, and if any attempt has been made to salvage them; also date if possible:

Merida, sunk near Cape Charles, Va.
Lexington, off Bridgeport, Conn.
Republic, off Nantucket, Mass.

—L. H. STEELE, Peekskill, New York.

Reply, by Mr. Harry E. Rieseberg:—If the information which you seek is of American Merchant Vessels I can be of service to you, but am unable to furnish the exact location in many cases as many vessels which have been lost have since floated on the bottom to a different place; however, I can tell you where they were lost and you may from that locate further information from the residents of the locality.

In the case of those which you list in your letter, I can advise you as follows:

Steamship *Merida*. 3,329 gross, 2,389 net; 360.0 length, 45.0 breadth, and 20.8 depth; built of steel at West Bay City, Mich., in 1893, and foundered October 20, 1916 in Lake Erie between Southeast Shoal and Long Point. Owner at the time of loss was the Valley Camp Steamship Co., of Fairport, Ohio. (I do not know whether this is the same one which you have reference to or not, but it is the only large one of which I have a record.)

Steamship *Lexington*. 2,005 gross, 1,112 net; 257.3 length, 38.7 breadth, and 16.0 depth; built of iron at Chester, Pa., in 1877, and was dismantled and scrapped for junk at New York October 5, 1923. Owner at the time was the Northern Transportation Company, of Wilmington, Del.

Steamship *Republic*, 4,159 gross, 2,609 net; 345.1 length, 49.1 breadth, and 25.1 depth; built of steel at Sunderland, England, in 1907 and was formerly named the *Walkure* and then owned by the Germans; and was sold by the American owners to the Norwegian flag October 29, 1924 at which time it was owned by the Chile Steamship Company, of New York, N. Y.

Smoke and Flame

HAS any one ever seen a "smoking revolver" or a "flaming automatic" outside the pages of fiction?

Request:—"I find now and then statements from various parties that a silencer can not be used on a pistol, yet I am constantly reading stories in which silencers are so used.

Please give me your dictum on this.

Also settle the question for me as to the smoking revolver."—S. F. EDMONDS, Lemon Cove, California.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The only hand guns on which I ever knew silencers to operate properly, that is, to kill the report successfully, were the single shot target pistols, and the .22 Colt and Reising automatic pistols. On the heavier automatic or the revolver, they could not be utilized, and due to escape of gas by the space between barrel and cylinder in the revolver, or the opening of the action in the automatic, no silencing device was ever designed that did the work, although many tried it.

The authors do some funny stunts with the weapons used by their characters. I recall the story that had an officer in the Revolution standing off a horde of Indians with *revolvers*, while the "flaming automatic" is a favorite with the present school of literati. Who ever saw an automatic pistol flame? I never did, and goodness knows I've used them frequently enough to know.

Personally, I consider that the chaps who write for *Adventure* have a very good idea of what firearms will or will not do; they have a very critical audience sitting around the fire in the shadows, you know. Men like yourself, and me, for instance.

I've seen revolvers used for about everything that the mind can imagine, and while I've opened the breech and seen some fine curls of gas lingering in the bore, I can't recall ever seeing the typical "smoking revolver" the boys are so fond of alluding to in stories. Modern powders are not built that way.

And even in my use of the old black powder loads, both in the cartridge guns and the Colt cap-and-ball revolvers, I can't remember any smoke after the shot. So I join you in the opinion that "there ain't no such animal."

The Old Army

WHEN blue uniforms were in flower.

Request:—"My hobby is wax modeling on a scale of, roughly, three feet to one inch, and most of my material comes from the West, old and new. Just at present I am anxious to crystallize something of the dignity of the old Indian-military powwows, and shall be very grateful if you will put me right on the following little points of the old cavalry uniforms.

1. In the cavalry uniform of the 'sixties onwards to the adoption of khaki, what was the color of (a) Breeches, (b) Breeches-stripe, (c) Great-coat, cape, and lining, (d) Buttons, and (e) Belt, boots and leather equipment?

2. In what circumstances and by what ranks was the stiff white collar worn beneath the tunic collar?

3. Was the campaign neckerchief regulation or optional, and was it of any standard color?

4. When was the felt hat (Stetson?) introduced?

5. In what circumstances was it worn, what color was it for officers, and men, and did it entirely supersede the old peaked cap?

6. How were revolvers carried, and by what soldiers?

7. What of these details differed according to rank?

8. When was the blue uniform discontinued?

In all this I have in mind those regiments that were employed in policing the frontier, such as the ill-fated 7th Cavalry."—G. E. TURNER, Oxford, England.

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—May I preface my replies to your definite questions by saying that the dates given are to be taken as only approximate so far as the actual changes in colors and styles of uniforms are concerned. The dates given are those in which the change was officially promulgated by the War Department, but due to stocks already on hand and other causes actual changes in the field would be delayed months and in some cases perhaps a year or two while the old styles were being used up and new supplies furnished. Also the greater the distance from populated centers, especially in the case of organizations on the frontier, the slower the changes took place in actual practise, and the more likely there would be local departure from the regulations. With this general discussion I will go on to your specific questions.

1. (a) Breeches did not come into use in the United States Army until just before the Spanish-American War. All troops including the cavalry wore trousers, tucking the long loose legs inside the riding boots or leggings when necessary. At the beginning of the period you mention (1860) these trousers were dark blue, the same as the coats. In 1863, however, the light blue or sky blue shade was adopted for trousers and this color was used down to the World War period.

(b) The breeches stripe for cavalry was always yellow. Of enlisted men only the non-commissioned officers wore the breeches stripe.

(c) At the beginning of the period you mention the overcoat was dark blue for officers, the cape and lining being of the same color. For enlisted men the color was light, or sky blue. In 1863 the regulations prescribed the light blue shade for officers, but returned to dark blue in 1872 and in 1879 prescribed linings for both officers and enlisted men to "be of the same color as the facings" which for cavalry, of course, were yellow. It was also prescribed that officers might wear the enlisted men's overcoat on the frontier and on campaign. The cape of course was always a part of the officers' coat and not of the enlisted men's, and it was detachable and removed when on duty with troops.

(d) Buttons on the blue uniform were always gilt, the standard sizes being 7/8 inches for officers and one-half inch for enlisted men.

(e) During most of this period there was no prescribed boot or shoe, although of course they would be black in color. The supply for the Army was manufactured by the Quartermaster Department while officers would often buy their own from commercial patterns. Early in the period half length boots with the trousers tucked in were worn by mounted troops while foot troops wore the ordinary shoe of the day known as "Jeffersons." The cavalry boot as we know it today did not come into use until the advent of khaki and the passing of the old Indian fighting Army. Canvas leggings were used in the 'nineties and sometime afterward and russet leather leggings came into use about the time of the Spanish-American War. Enlisted men wore a plain black leather belt, while that for the officers developed after 1860 from a black leather belt into one made up of four stripes of gold lace, interwoven with silk of the color of the branch and lined with black enameled leather.

OFFICERS used the stiff white collar from 1860 on—the exact pattern changing somewhat with the current styles. It was not until 1888 that the Government furnished them for enlisted men. They were not, of course, worn on field service but for dress and ceremonies.

3. The neckerchief was never an article of issue and there were no regulations covering it. In most cases it would have been blue or black, but its color and whether it was worn at all would have depended upon the individual or the local commanding officer. They were generally used on the frontier, however.

4, 5. By the "Stetson" I presume that you mean the hat of the type worn for field service at present. Black, soft felt hats were worn for field service from the Civil War period down to the Spanish-American War period. Then with the new olive drab uniform came the forerunner of the present hat, a hat of olive drab felt, with round, soft brim, turned up at one

side. The present hat is the typical "Stetson," high crown, round, stiff brim. The hat of whatever shade and shape (except a special dress hat formerly used) has always been used for field service only. It did not replace the cap worn with the dress uniforms. The hat is the same shape for officers and men, the distinction being in the hat cords.

6, 7. During the period of the later Indian wars revolvers were carried by both officers and enlisted men in the cavalry. The weapon was carried in a black leather holster attached to the belt just above and forward of the right hip, handle of the weapon to the front. The equipment and method of carrying it were the same for ranks.

8. The blue uniform was replaced for field service by khaki in 1898, during the Spanish-American War. The dress uniform continued to be worn (with modification from time to time) until the World War period when it was replaced for all purposes by the olive drab.

The olive drab was a war measure which has continued almost down to the present for reasons of economy, but it appears likely that the Army will return to the blue dress uniforms.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

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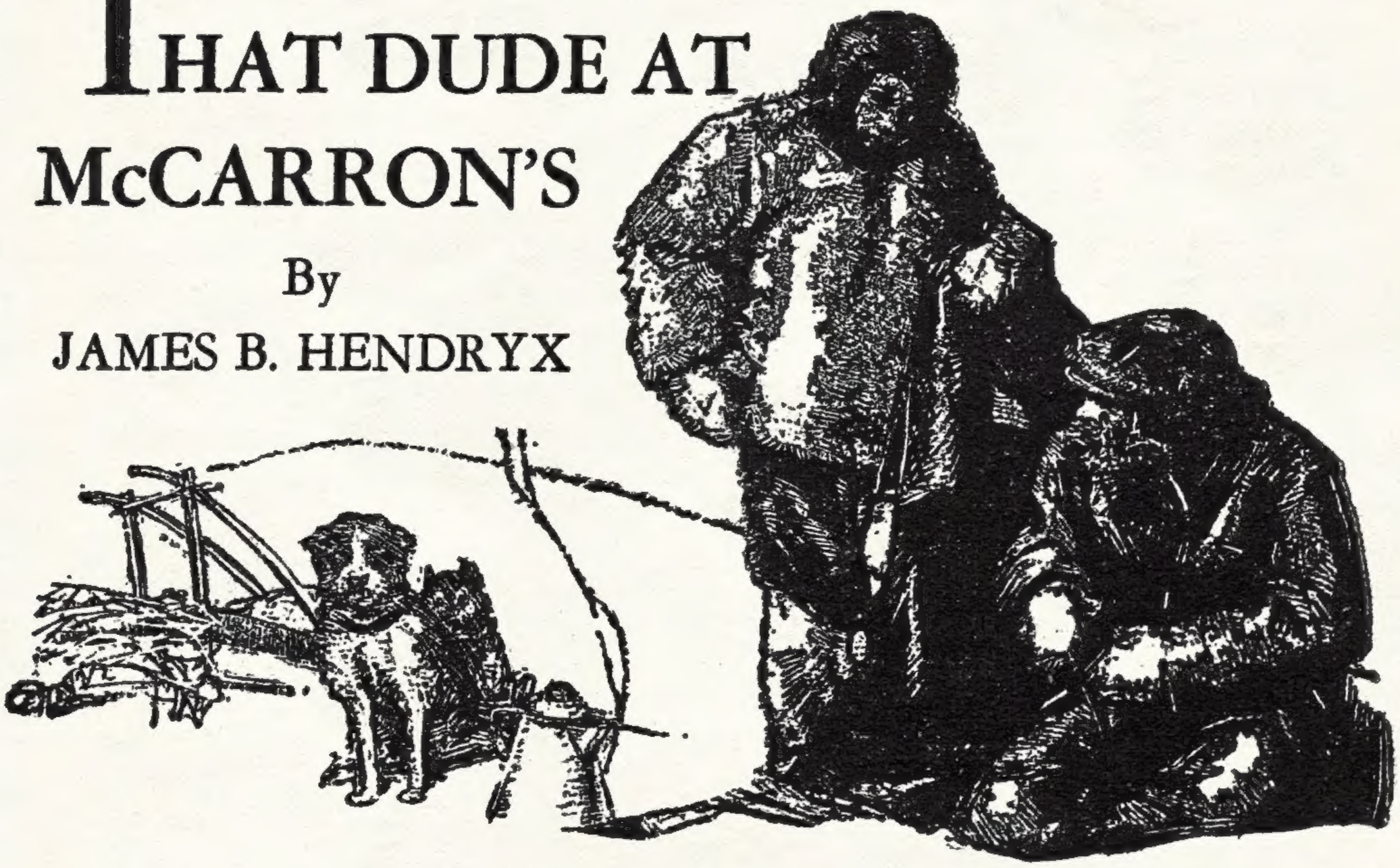

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